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THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

BENJAMIN DISRAELI,

M.P.

A Critical Biography.

BY

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BENJAMIN DISRAELI, M.P.

I.

THE high rank attained by Mr. Disraeli among contemporary statesmen, and the cordial if tardy acknowledgment of his claims, not only as a man of genius, but also as a man of business, have effectually disposed of the charge made by some political thinkers, that the government of this country had become a sort of hereditary appanage of the aristocracy. Each of the great historical parties has now given proof of a willingness to disregard the prejudice which assumed the unfitness of literary men to conduct important departments of the administration. In the person of Mr. Macaulay, the Whigs, in that of Mr. Disraeli, the Tories, have set an example which there is good reason to believe will hereafter be followed. The appointment of those gentlemen to Cabinet Offices, and Privy Councillorships, has been at once a tribute to literature, and the best possible practical vindication of the British Constitution.

To those who only regard the present position of Mr. Disraeli, forgetting his personal antecedents, and the difficulties he had to encounter in

the scepticism of the public, and the ingenious detractions of his political adversaries, it is necessary to state that in this biographical notice of his career, none of his earlier follies will be concealed. It is not by hiding the early errors of eminent men that service is done to their reputation : it is rather the contrast presented by their later years that raises them in public estimation. When the superabundant heat and excitability of youth have passed away, the traces of such extravagancies mark the native force of genius or character of which they were the evanescent ebullitions ; and it is notorious that mankind ever feel more respect for a maturity that has resulted from the gradual expulsion of the fiery spirit of enterprise or self-display, than for that less questionable steadiness which is but the consolidation of mediocrity. Mr. Disraeli's past life will bear this test ; and, even more than some of his contemporaries, he gains in the present aspect of his character by the contrast it affords to that past life ; while, as even in his wildest escapades there was always manifested a noble daring, and aspirations only provocative of ridicule because unsupported by adequate powers, the confidence inspired by his later achievements ought not to be lessened by fears of a relapse. Our retrospect will cast back through many years of violent vicissitude.

Pretension and presumption are so repugnant to the feelings of the British people, that even talent of a high order will be undervalued, if its possessor be too eager to display it. Forgetting

that the desire for praise and admiration is the great spur to intellectual exertion, we too readily mistake its promptings for a more ignoble habit of mind. The Love of Fame is often confounded with Vanity; and the ebullitions of an ambitious spirit or a luxuriant imagination are undeservedly condemned as mere extravagancies of self-esteem. Amidst the tares and weeds, we overlook the true but humble shoot that struggles feebly though steadily to the light. We laugh at superficial errors and follies, because we are unable or unwilling to discern the germ of truth which they obscure. A forced and often an unnatural union is demanded between merit and modesty; though all experience teaches us that where intellectual power exists, latent, perhaps, but really in greatest fortitude, it is often there that the most violent, the most ill-regulated, the most extravagant efforts are made for its development. Thus it is that we allow painstaking, humble mediocrity to deceive us, while we disregard its natural superior; and we stifle and crush many a strong aspiring spirit in the very throes of its young life,—if, indeed, we do not more frequently turn it aside into false channels, to expend its natural force in uncongenial modes of action. It is our practical genius that makes us hate ideas. Whether this habit of mind be a right or a wrong one it matters not here; it is a fact. We apply the ‘workhouse test’ to all things new. If a Columbus came among us with the theory of a new world, we should try the navigator’s claims by putting him to the oar.

There is another habit of the national mind, which, like this instinctive mistrust of theories and new ideas, affects the efforts and position of a man who desires to rise in the world. The English are suspicious of sudden success; they value no reputation, however brilliant, if it has sprung up, mushroom-like, in a night. Their commercial habits, as well as their political experience, point to one great moral rule. Slow and steady it is with them that wins the race. The idea of apprenticeship, realised in all trades and professions, pervades also their notions of political usefulness. If they murmur at finding a prince of the blood put to the command of an invading expedition, so they equally object to see a new or undisciplined mind invested with political power, even though the individual so selected may be the creature of their own favour. It is the same in all pursuits of life.

If we are obtusely dubious of a success when it stares us in the face, it is not surprising that our national prejudice should extend with still greater force to the effort to realise it. If we undervalue a reputation suddenly acquired, it is natural that we should go the length even of ridiculing the attempts made to acquire it. Woe to the aspiring mind that will strive to reach the goal by any but the beaten path! At every deviation he will meet impassable barriers; and every successful obstruction of his efforts will be hailed with exulting laughter by the unsympathising multitude, while he will himself be thrust back

again to the very rear. We have been so often taken in by charlatans and impostors, both in politics and literature, that our natural magnanimity and generosity have become absorbed in a necessary selfishness; and we shew a remorseless want of pity for the extravagancies of an exuberant mind, if its ambition be too great to put itself in harness, and submit to that training by which it can alone become strengthened and consolidated. In the House of Commons, this disposition to enjoy the discomfiture of pretension is concentrated until it perpetually forces itself into action. They will bow deferentially before a master-mind, one of the conditions of superiority being the possession of a tact sufficient to avoid glaring failures. On the other hand, they will cherish the slightest indications of merit or of intellectual power, if they are put forward modestly and without pretension. But they are unmerciful towards those who would seek to take them by storm without having the requisite *matériel*. There are many living instances of gentlemen who have been utterly cowed and put down, laughed into perpetual silence, in consequence of some unlucky flight of halting rhetoric, but who are in mind immeasurably superior to those by whom they were sacrificed. Unless men who are ambitious of distinction will make themselves masters of what may be termed the mechanics of oratory and statesmanship, the highest powers of mind will be lost upon the House of Commons. To succeed there, every man must to a certain

extent be an actor—must merge his individuality in some specific character, which he must strive to impress as a whole upon the general mind of the House. And the line, which he thus may mark out for himself, must be one tending to some practical result, either as regards legislative usefulness, or its effect on political combinations. Mere abstract theories of policy or government find a deaf ear in the House of Commons. So also will the most novel ideas, the most brilliant metaphors, the most sterling enthusiasm, unless used in furtherance of some tangible, intelligible object. A young thinker, fresh from the schools or the libraries, may indulge in his day-dreams of legislative perfectibility, or may strive to impress the representatives and rulers of the nation with more exalted ideas of their functions, and of true policy of state; but if he be not met at the very outset with overpowering ridicule, he will at least be treated with that chilling neglect, that scarcely concealed contempt, which comfortable, complacent mediocrity has always at hand for any manifestations of that genius which it so ignobly hates. But if the very same man who thus fails in his more exalted aim, descends into the arena equipped for combat, and by planting one or two successful blows on an antagonist shews that he is, by ever so little, a proficient in the science which especially finds favour in a debating society, he may thenceforth bring forward his ideas and his theories in whatever shape he will, so that they have a practical bearing; and the very same

views which, under other circumstances, would expose him to ridicule, will now procure him attentive listening, and, in all probability, party alliances, if not personal converts.

It would seem to be a species of instinct which prompts the English to be thus suspicious of all novelty. This habitual mistrust applies in a marked manner to public men. However able as an advocate or as a leader, an aspirant to office has to overcome a primary difficulty in an inert opposition. The public have never been accustomed to associate his name with a ministerial position; and he labours for the time being under nearly as much disfavour as if he had been proved incapable. A sagacious chancellor lifts a stuff-gownsmen from the back row to the judgment-seat; a large-minded premier converts an Oxford student and divinity-man into a commerce and finance minister, or manufactures a working member of the Board of Trade out of a newspaper editor; a pupil and *protégé* of a great historical party rises by rotation to its leadership while in opposition, and glides naturally into the premiership when the wheel of fortune turns up that luck: all these personages have long since earned by approved ability their novel positions; yet to the sceptical eye of John Bull, they are still invested with all the suspicious characteristics of 'new men,' and are set down in his own secret mind as incapables. But office sanctifies. One season in Downing Street or in Westminster Hall dissipates the cloud of prejudice against them; and our

good public are now as ready to take them upon trust, to invest them with all imaginable qualities of the lawyer, the legislator, or the statesman, as before they begrudged even the most ordinary allowance of confidence.

Mr. Disraeli, throughout his eccentric career, has singularly exemplified the operation of these prejudices, and the truth of those propositions. If we look back at the many brilliant productions of his pen, that for more than twenty years have been the delight of his contemporaries (not only his fellow-subjects, but also the natives of every country in the civilised portion of the globe), we shall be struck with astonishment that he should have held, until a comparatively recent period, so low a place in the opinion of the great mass of his countrymen; that his name should have been associated with ideas of egotism, vanity, pretension, extravagance, and crudity never to be matured; and that not only as a party man should he have been regarded as unsafe, but that as a political thinker he should have been held to be unsound. For unquestionably through these various publications, whether works of fiction or political demonstrations, there were scattered passages not surpassed by any contemporary writer; and clear, intelligible ideas of policy, which ought to have commanded attention, if only that they might be discussed, and, if possible, refuted. On the other hand, it is equally a reason for surprise, the contrasted position of Mr. Disraeli, when, in the session of 1846, he drew off in triumph from his prolonged contest

with Sir Robert Peel, with that in which he was in the year 1837, when he consummated the most egregious and ridiculous failure, the same amount of abilities being assumed, that had ever befallen any man in the House of Commons.

To account for these contradictions, and at the same time to trace the causes of his continued political proscription, as well as his deferred success, it will be necessary to cast a backward glance at the main events of his literary and political life. The temptation to smile—nay, even to indulge in a good English guffaw (which in these days of superficial refinement has become a rare and dangerous indulgence), will from time to time be great; but in watching the Protean efforts of Mr. Disraeli to slip in many false characters into the Temple of Fame, we shall strive not to lose sight of the remarkable fact, that at the very eleventh hour, when he was supposed to have burnt out all his natural fire, and to have ‘gone out,’ like many other eccentric human pyrotechnics, with a most unsavoury odour, he should suddenly have shot up again with renewed life and brilliancy, and have attained a perfection as a debater which has had no parallel since the genius of Canning ceased to illumine the dull atmosphere of senatorial mediocrity with the fitful flashes of his incomparable wit.

II.

A VERY few facts will suffice to introduce the public career of Mr. Disraeli to the reader. It

is known to all the world that he is the son of the late Mr. Disraeli, the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* and other household books. The future orator and statesman was born in the year 1806. His childhood was characterised by a singular precocity of talent—a premature development of the faculty of observation. In his adolescence he was subjected to the severe corrective of a city life. The future Chancellor of the Exchequer spent in the hard service of a lawyer's office much of the time he would rather have devoted to the muses. We do not consider ourselves called on to enter into mere gossiping details, however interesting, of this period of Mr. Disraeli's career. His native genius soon broke through those trammels.

Mr. Disraeli would have been successful at an earlier stage in his career, if he had had less cleverness and more craft. An ambition disproportioned to his position inspired him with preposterous hopes and aims; and an unfortunate gift of the power of satire supplied him at once with the temptation and the means of securing a sudden and too easy notoriety. He has always been in a hurry to be a great man. It has been his error to have, from time to time, overlooked the wide gulf, the toilsome and laborious interval, between the conception of a grand idea, the creation of a comprehensive theory, and its realisation. He has achieved the most brilliant triumphs, in imagination; in act, he has sustained almost as many defeats. He would always be himself alone. He was his own General, his own Army, his own Gazette to record his victories. He never served. He must always

be a leader, even of imaginary troops; prince, of even the pettiest royalty. Not really more of an egotist than many men around him who possessed more cunning, it was always his misfortune to appear intensely egotistical. As John Bull is a great leveller where individual vanity is concerned, this habit of mind was fatal to Mr. Disraeli in public opinion. The temptation to laugh in return at the man who was the satirist of all around him, was irresistible. Unfortunately, he has given too many opportunities. In a series of dashing assaults on the portals of the Temple of Fame, in his earlier political life, he has only once or twice come off signally victorious. Either his undertaking has been too great for his powers, or his powers, strong in themselves, have been so ill-disciplined as to have become worse than weak. In the many attempts of his vigorous vanity to make a position for himself, it is remarkable in what a variety of different shapes his mind has sought expression. As a romance writer, a political and social satirist, newspaper editor, pamphleteer, poet, orator, he has from time to time betrayed how great were his aims, while he has seldom succeeded in completely attaining them. A trap was laid for his vain-glorious spirit at the very outset of his career. At the risk of being paradoxical, we would say that all his after failures were owing to his first success. It has taken him nearly twenty years to get over its effects on his too ardent and susceptible mind.

The appearance of *Vivian Grey* (Mr. Disraeli's first published work of any magnitude), in the year 1828, caused a great excitement in the literary

world. The book was eagerly read. The bold handling, and almost reckless power; the views of society, if often impudently false, still strikingly original and coherent; the graphic portraiture; the dashing satire and glowing sentiment with which its pages abounded, supplied an irresistible stimulus to the literary appetite of the day, till, although the wise condemned and the critical sneered, those who read only for amusement were delighted, and there were not wanting many of good authority who saw in this first shoot of a young intellect the germs of future vigour and strength. It is not our province, in this sketch, to enter into any critical analysis of the purely literary portion of Mr. Disraeli's works. Their beauties and defects have been sufficiently ascertained from time to time as they appeared. But, in another respect, they come within the scope of our plan; for they have, almost without an exception, a political bearing. In *Vivian Grey*, itself, we find the germ of much of the subsequent fruition of Mr. Disraeli's mind. It is more than probable that he was in imagination the hero of his own tale; for he has there created an atmosphere, and called characters into existence, such as would form the world in which he would delight, could he have the making of it. Throughout his political life Mr. Disraeli has been looking out for a *Marquis de Carabas*, whom he could make the lever of his ambition, the accomplice of his spasmodic patriotism. The author struggled convulsively to retain his uncertain tenure; but there was at that time no sound basis

for his reputation, and he was almost the last to discover this vital weakness. The faults of *Vivian Grey* became, in some subsequent works, exaggerated to a degree of absurdity utterly incomprehensible, when we look at the literary perfection, and, at times, at the severe taste, of some of the later productions of the same mind. These extravagances were more glaring in his non-political works. His *Contarini Fleming*, or, as he afterwards styled it, *The Psychological Romance*, in spite of its superficial views and flashy sentiment, its false colouring and exaggerated tone, exhibited unquestionable power and striking originality; and in those portions in which court and political intrigues were sketched and diplomatic character portrayed, there were quite as much satirical force and vigour of handling as in any of the scenes in *Vivian Grey*. There was the same unconscious, or, perhaps, intentional self-painting, the same idealising of Benjamin Disraeli, his thoughts, his person, and his deeds, the same *veni, vidi, vici* trick of ruling men in imagination, of astonishing mankind by grand theories, of being all-in-all with kings and ministers, that have ever characterised the intellectual efforts of this brilliant but too ambitious politician, and have made him overlook, from time to time, all those barriers which the real, unpoetical world opposed to his vaulting spirit. As a purely literary work, if, like the pictures of some of our living artists, it was designed and coloured to gratify the false taste of a contemporary public, it at least deserves the praise of being consistent with

itself, whilst its exuberant imagery and captivating diction render it at once an exciting and a delightful stimulant to the imagination. For our present purpose it is chiefly valuable as being, in the parts to which we have referred, a reflection of the author's political feelings at the time he wrote it. If, in *Vivian Grey*, Mr. Disraeli must be suspected of having imagined for himself facile and brilliant triumphs on the domestic stage of politics, so, in his *Psychological Romance*, he seems to have indulged in grand reveries, of which foreign countries and politics were the scene, till one might almost fancy him, in his own conceit, Consul-general everywhere, and Plenipotentiary to all the rulers of the earth. But the *Wondrous Tale of Alroy*, and an anomalous twin-birth of the same date, brought the sins of Mr. Disraeli to their climax. That work was universally hailed as a damning evidence of literary lunacy. Wild, incongruous romance, and daring tamperings with history, might have been lost sight of in the brilliancy and glare of Eastern colouring ; but the infatuated attempts to reconstruct the English language—to make bad poetry do duty as rythmical prose, till the writer seemed to be literally cantering through his work, raised an universal shout of derision. It was more than good John Bull, though apt enough to admire the unintelligible, could bear. He flung down the book with feelings more of pity than even of disgust, and would, with the most conscientious feelings, have consigned the author to literary restraint. Yet did Mr. Disraeli perpetrate one more offence

of a kindred order, if there be any natural affinity between mad poetry and mad prose. He made one more valorous invasion of the realms of common sense ere his literary ardour became diverted into more recognised channels. He now aspired to be the poet of his age. It seems that he had been a Wanderer for some space of time, brief to common men, but to him an age, in the multitude of impressions it produced; until one day he found himself, in Asia Minor, or among the Pyramids, or in some other equally poetical and uncomfortable place. The promptings of a diseased vanity, which he seems to have mistaken for the divine *afflatus*, determined him to become a great poet—to be the interpreter of his era. Musing, he thought aloud, 'The poet hath ever embodied the spirit of his time;' 'and,' whispered the voice of the tempter, 'Benjamin Disraeli still lives.' Again he mused in speech. 'The most heroic incident of an heroic age produced in the *Iliad* an heroic Epic; the Consolidation of the most superb of empires produced in the *Æneid* a Political Epic; the Revival of Learning and the Birth of Vernacular Genius give us, in the *Divine Comedy*, a National Epic; and the Reformation and its consequences called from the rapt Lyre of Milton a Religious Epic.' And then, with retrospective eye, in no doubt very fine frenzy rolling, he reviews the half century of contending principles of government, from the outbreak of the French Revolution, and seeing that its heroes—from Robespierre and Napoleon down to Joseph Hume

and John Frost—have had no one to build the lofty rhyme on their behalf, he suddenly exclaims, ‘For Me remains the Revolutionary Epic.’ And straight-way he rushes back to Europe, and publishes in imposing *quarto* his inspirations, entitling them, with unparalleled assurance, *The Revolutionary Epic; the work of Disraeli the Younger, author of The Psychological Romance*. In the preface, where he has recorded the foregoing musings, he adds, that the book is only a part of a greater whole; that he submits it to the judgment of the public, not being one of those who can find consolation for the neglect of contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity. With a candour and resignation ill according with his magniloquent announcement, he adds, ‘that if the decision of the public should be in the negative, then will he, without a pang, hurl his Lyre to Limbo.’ As the remainder of the poem has never been heard of, let us hope that the poet has been as good as his word.

It is not with any malicious feeling that we thus recall to memory the extravagancies of this persevering satirist of other men’s follies. Unless we do so, it will be impossible to get over the contrast between Mr. Disraeli as he is, and the personage who appeared before the public as Disraeli the Younger. *The Revolutionary Epic*, however, in spite of an extravagant and incongruous machinery, and a misapprehension, as we conceive, of the very spirit and object of poetical art, possesses, independent of some occasional beauties, and some

passages of great power, an interest in connexion with our present purpose. When the feeling of the ludicrous has subsided, and the few fine passages in the poem have been separated from the flashy philosophy and ambitious commonplace with which it abounds, it will be found to contain the outline of intelligible and consistent views of human affairs, and more especially the germ of those peculiar political opinions which Mr. Disraeli, in later years, both as a writer and an orator, has advocated amidst so much ridicule, with so much success. The general principle of a party, few in number but rich in talent, and who have been hitherto undervalued, will be found in this remarkable and extravagant production; and Mr. Disraeli's ideas of Young Englandism, as afterwards explained in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, are here struggling into light amidst many weed-like absurdities. This is one of the evidences, whereof we shall accumulate more as we go on, of the consistency and sincerity of Mr. Disraeli—as a political thinker. There are other works of a purely literary character written by Mr. Disraeli,—novels, plays, poems, and satirical sketches,—with which the reader is doubtless familiar.

Of *Henrietta Temple* (published in November, 1836), an accomplished critic observes that it is 'one of the most agreeable love-stories ever written.' In May, of the following year, Mr. Disraeli published another novel, which he entitled *Venetia*. Its chief interest is derived from an admirable delineation of the respective characters of

Lord Byron and Shelley, under the names of Cadurcis and Herbert. In June, 1839, appeared *Alarcos*,² a tragedy; and five years after, the public were charmed with *Coningsby*, a work which may be said to have initiated a new species of fiction, which combines with the ordinary interest of a romance, the discussion of contemporary politics, and the still more interesting social problems of the epoch. This work was speedily followed by two kindred productions, *Sybil* and *Tancred*. Mr. Disraeli also published an edition of one of his father's works; and the well-known *Political Biography of Lord George Bentinck*.

III.

THE political career of Mr. Disraeli has been as eccentric as his literary life, and his pretensions as presumptuous. The feverish excitement of the Reform agitation could not but communicate itself to so ardent a spirit. It seems that while that agitation was in process, and until its final consummation, he was absent from England on his travels in different parts of Europe and the East. In 1832 he returned to England; and the same inordinate ambition which led him to aspire to be the poet of his age, drew him at once with confidence into the political arena. To judge from the nature of his proceedings, it would seem as if he thought that he had but to shew himself—that he had but to announce, with trumpet and gong,

the return of Disraeli the Younger from the Pyramids, in order to be at once the shining light of the day, to be courted as a leader, or at least as a coadjutor, by political parties. With a love of violent contrasts, quite in keeping with the general character of his literary works, he formed at once a most singular political alliance. Finding 'a House of Commons packed, and the independence of the House of Lords announced as having terminated, he saw the country in the very danger it had escaped from by a miracle a century before—that of being bound hand and foot, and in the power of the Whigs.' Where all other men in the nation were in terror of a rampant democracy, he, Disraeli the Younger, saw only an impending oligarchy. Therefore he determined to oppose the Whigs, or, in his own phrase, to grapple with the great Leviathan. But if he would not join the Whigs, with what party should he act? Not the Tories! No, not with them, by any means. Why? Was it that they had no illustrious men at their head? no leaders, of world-wide reputation, who, by their conquests in the field, in diplomacy and the senate, had proved their title to conduct public affairs, and their right to form a judgment on the position of their party? No; it was because Disraeli the Younger found them in a state of 'ignorant stupefaction,' haunted with nervous apprehension of that 'great bugbear, the People—that bewildering title, under which a miserable minority contrive to coerce and plunder a nation;' because they 'fancied that they

were on the eve of a reign of terror, when they were about to sink under the sovereignty of a Council of Ten ;' because, in fine, they—that is to say a Wellington, a Peel, a Lyndhurst—were 'ignorant' that they who had led the nation so long were 'the nation's natural leaders ;' and because Disraeli the Younger, just come back from the East, was so disgusted at their indolent imbecility, that he positively refused to lend them his assistance in recovering their lost power. Then what shape was this hot and eager spirit to assume ? He could not be a Whig ; he would not be a Tory ; so there was no alternative for him but to be a Radical.

And a Radical he straightway became ; not, however, the sort of Radical to which John Bull has been accustomed ; for the soaring spirit that had conceived the *Revolutionary Epic* was not to be chained in submission to any defined opinions or course of policy. (His Radicalism consisted, apparently, of two elements—a desire to get into parliament any how, and a well simulated hatred of the Whigs, because abusing them afforded scope for fine writing, and for displaying a knowledge of constitutional history. One evidence of modesty on the part of Mr. Disraeli at this period deserves to be recorded. He did *not* offer himself as a candidate for the City of London ; nor did he wait till a deputation from Yorkshire came to offer him a requisition and support. He actually went down to the small borough of High Wycombe, in the neighbourhood of which his father's

estate lay, and offered himself to the constituents, who, good wondering people, tried all they possibly could to understand him. But they were completely puzzled by this Oriental apparition. Mr. Disraeli had, however, so far adopted common mundane precautions as to seek some support and recommendation from the chief Liberals of the day. Whether he sought it himself or got Sir Edward Bulwer to do it for him, is a matter of small importance, the fact being, that whatever might be his mental reservation, he was at that time ostensibly identified with the Radical party. Mr. O'Connell and Mr. Hume were applied to for recommendations. Neither of them had any personal influence in the borough; but the latter sent, through Sir Edward Bulwer, a written character of Mr. Disraeli, in which he recommended him generally to the good-will of the electors. Such a passport from the then great Warwick of the radical party almost amounted to a mandate, and possibly Mr. Disraeli might have succeeded, but that Mr. Hume seems meanwhile to have discovered that his Radicalism went no further than partisan hatred to the Whigs; that, in fact, he was only a Tory in disguise. Mr. Hume thereupon commenced a more active canvass for the Whig candidates; and the result was that Colonel Grey and his Whig colleague were returned, Mr. Disraeli being defeated by the former with a small difference of numbers. The game he played at Wycombe was a shrewd and significant one. He strove to unite the Tories and the

Radicals against the Whigs, thus neutralising dissimilarity of opinions by identity of hatreds. We shall see that this idea has been often reproduced by Mr. Disraeli; and that what was at first intended as a purely partisan combination, has been fused by his creative faculty into an intelligible scheme of policy.

One exhibition made by Mr. Disraeli at this period of his life is too rich an example of the truth of our theory of his character to be passed over. We question whether the boldest adventurer in political history ever made so daring an assault on the common sense of his countrymen. It was about the time to which we have just referred that the advertisement sheet of the morning papers contained rather a startling announcement. It consisted of one line, of three words; and those words were, '*What is He?*' Curiosity was excited to know who 'He' was; and Hatchard's shop was straightway besieged with customers who spent sixpence in buying a small pamphlet, which, when they had bought it, they could not understand. The enigma, however, was partially explained. It seems that somebody or other had called the attention of Mr. Disraeli to a question incidentally asked by Earl Grey, the then prime minister, as to what were the political opinions of one who had, in various ways, made so much noise in the world. It was a very natural question, even for the astute Whig leader to ask, for at that time Mr. Disraeli's political foresight was looked upon as so much am-

bitious folly. The sterling truth of some of his opinions, and the value of his prophetic denunciations of Whig oligarchical ambition, were overlooked in the ridicule excited by his presumptuous and pretentious mode of announcing them. It is possible that Earl Grey took so little interest in the subject of his casual question, as never to have read this answer. If he had, he might have met in its pages, certainly in a *bizarre* and extravagant shape, much that it would have been worth the while of his party to have thought deeply upon. Aware of their own ‘grasping’ plans, they might have detected what to others was hidden—an under-current of common sense, as well as of political vaticination, in the hot thoughts and flaming periods which the author of the pamphlet poured, like so many streams of lava, through his pages. But to the million, and especially to the constituencies of that day, besotted as they were with the most extravagant hopes from their rulers, it was utterly unintelligible. The strange presumptuous shape in which it appeared, confirmed all previous impressions that had been formed of its author, and it was looked upon only as the latest and most glaring instance of his overweening and impracticable vanity. In postponing our notice of this publication to that of *The Revolutionary Epic*, we have anticipated dates; but the latter seems, from internal evidence, to have been conceived, and possibly written, before the pamphlet, which was a sudden spirit of temporary excitement, forgotten almost as soon

as published. It is now out of print. The next attempt of Mr. Disraeli to attain political position was when, soon after these last occurrences, an election was expected for Marylebone. He might not have been so far wrong in his calculation, had he been able to persist in his attempt; for experience has shown how capricious the worthy electors of that borough are in their inclinations and attachments. The expected election never took place; but Mr. Disraeli committed himself quite as much as if it had. He canvassed some of the electors, and among others called upon his old friend Mr. Hume. His object at this time was to get in on the Radical interest; and he still persisted in his *Vivian Grey-ish* manœuvre, of trying to make a partisan Tory's hatred of Whiggism pass off as honest, wholesome Radicalism. At Wycombe he had proposed a bare-faced coalition between the two extremes of political parties; but by this time he had learned to gloss over the startling contrasts of so crude an alliance, and had succeeded, by laying on his original design a thick coating of historical varnish, to produce what looked rather like a high-toned picture. This accession of artistic power soon developed itself in one or two political works, which displayed much more soundness, steadiness of purpose, and maturity of judgment, than his previous manifestoes. He had by this time begun to curb his Pegasus. In an address to the electors of High Wycombe, which was afterwards published with the title of *The Crisis Examined*,

he more distinctly shadows forth that scheme of Anti-Whig Liberalism, of Tory Radicalism, of Absolutism and well-governing combined, which formed the only intelligible portion of the theories of the Young England party. There is more power and less extravagance in this production of his pen, than in any previous political publication; and, much as the Whigs still affected to despise him, they must have smarted under the ridicule here poured on them as a party. The germ of that power of ludicrous illustration with which he has since so often convulsed the House of Commons, may be found in his description of the then state of the Whig party, deserted as they had been by all the great men of the Reform agitation, whose places were filled by shadows of statesmen. Referring to Ducrow's popular performance of 'The St. Petersburg Courier,' where he rode six horses at once, he supposes that the nobler quadrupeds one by one fall sick, or have the 'staggers,' and are replaced by long-eared substitutes, the humblest of the equine order, though still from day to day the original six horses are advertised to run, and the public go, believing they shall see them. They put up with the deception for one, two, three, four days, until at last the game can be carried on no longer; the adventurous equestrian cannot manage his asinine steeds; the deception explodes; and Mr. Merri-man himself, who, like the Lord Chancellor (Brougham), was once the life of the ring, now lies his despairing length in the middle of the

stage, with his jokes exhausted and his bottle empty. We have not the passage at hand to quote, but the language is felicitous, and the illustration was, at that particular time, singularly apt and ludicrous.

The year 1835 was with Mr. Disraeli one of more than even his ordinary activity. He was perpetually blowing his trumpet, from its commencement to its close. The accession of Sir Robert Peel to power in November 1834, and the prospect of consolidation and united action in the Conservative party, led to a reasonable hope that Mr. Disraeli might be able to ride into parliament on their shoulders. So he leapt with a graceful facility off his old hobby, on to his new one. He boldly flung aside his mask of Radicalism, and came out a full-blown Tory. With his usual ambition, he again flew at high game;—went down to Taunton to oppose no less a person than Mr. Labouchere. In a subsequent explanation of his conduct, to which we shall have occasion again to refer, he maintains that his principles were still the same as when, a *quasi* Radical, three years before, he started for Wycombe; but that now the position of things was altered. He was now an earnest partisan of the Tories (by the by, Mr. Disraeli has an affected tenacity of old party names), because, under the guidance of their eloquent and able leader (his notions of Sir Robert Peel's talents were very different then from what they have been since), the principles of primitive Toryism had again developed themselves. With a

boldness of assertion, which shewed him oblivious to the common sense of mankind, he declared that in no longer advocating short parliaments and the ballot, he was not succumbing to the prejudices of his new allies; but that he abandoned those political specifics, because he now discovered less chance of an oligarchical tyranny; the power of the Whigs having been checked, and the balance of power more restored. The British public, heaven knows, are not wanting in party spirit; but so sudden a change of side, on such abstract grounds, they could not comprehend. It seemed to them simple, shameless inconsistency. Mr. Disraeli's conduct raised him still more active and implacable enemies. By this time Whigs and Radicals had been compelled to make common cause with each other against their Conservative enemy: and there was no longer any reason why they should be tender with their former neophyte and would-be ally. On all sides the vials of wrath were poured upon him. This was just the very thing he liked. It gave full employment to his combative spirit. He was always up and in his armour, with lance in rest—always had his hobby superbly caparisoned, ready to bear him to all sorts of victorious combats with imaginary antagonists.

Mr. Disraeli, with a courage which, considering his antecedents, must be pronounced audacious, issued the first challenge. In the report which appeared of his speech on the hustings at Taunton, towards the end of April 1835, he was represented

as having made a grossly scurrilous attack on Mr. O'Connell, calling him, among other choice epithets, 'Incendiary,' and 'Traitor,' and declaring that he was a 'Liar in action and in word,' that 'in his life he was a living lie.' It is needless to say that the great agitator was not the man to be outdone in coarse abuse. As usual, however, with him, what was grossly rude in his reply, was relieved by some touches of broad humour. A practical man like O'Connell would have a natural contempt for one whom he regarded as being only a flashy theorist; and, in addition, he bore him a strong antipathy on religious grounds, in consequence of his Hebrew origin, which for some reason (perhaps connected with mortgages) is a source of odium in Ireland. On the 2nd of May following, O'Connell fulminated a characteristic counter-attack, in which he fell upon his antagonist's inconsistencies, taunting him with having repaid by the foulest calumny the assistance he had given him at Wycombe; that 'having failed at Wycombe and Marylebone as a Radical Reformer, he now came out as a Conservative, and considered himself Tory enough to assume the leadership of the Tory party instead of Peel;' and then, having denounced him as a humbug of the first magnitude, he wound up with a coarse but adhesive piece of abusive sarcasm, in which, referring to the origin of Mr. Disraeli's family, he said, 'He had no doubt, if his genealogy were traced, it would be found that he was the true heir-at-law of the *impenitent* thief who atoned for his crimes on the cross.' The public laughed, in spite of some

disgust, at this piece of Swift-like humour, which they, perhaps, thought had been provoked by Mr. Disraeli, partly by his personal attacks, and partly by his audacious political inconsistency. The personalities stung Mr. Disraeli to madness. The Agitator, he knew, would not fight; therefore, on the principle of hereditary revenge, Mr. Disraeli sought to fight his family. He began with Mr. Morgan O'Connell; but that young gentleman, knowing, perhaps, his father's peculiarities, hesitated to establish so absurd and inconvenient a precedent. Their correspondence was duly published in the *Times*, and, if we mistake not, Mr. Disraeli was bound over to keep the peace. Debarred of his revenge by the pistol, he expended his wrath through his pen. In a letter to O'Connell, couched in terms of bombastic magniloquence, quite worthy of the author of *What is He?* and the *Revolutionary Epic*, he declared that if the Agitator *could* have acted like a gentleman, he would have hesitated to have made foul and insolent comments on a garbled and hasty report of his speech, which scarcely contained a sentence or an expression as they had emanated from his mouth. But the truth was, he said, that O'Connell was only too happy to pour venom on a man whom it was the interest of a party to represent as a political apostate. That epithet he indignantly disavowed. Concealing for the time his pro-Radical attempts, he would have it that he had from the first come forward only as the avowed enemy of the Whigs, whom he had then de-

nounced as a rapacious, tyrannical and incapable faction. Not having the fear of Mr. Hume or those mute witnesses, the newspaper files, before his eyes, he went on to deny that he had ever deserted a political friend, or changed a political opinion. He then alluded to the only interview he had had up to that time with O'Connell, saying, with retrospective candour, that he then thought him an overrated man, but that he had plainly told him, personally, that his agitation for Repeal would make it impossible that they could co-operate. In retorting O'Connell's scurrilous allusions, he says, 'It is quite clear that the hereditary bondsman has already forgotten the clank of his fetter. I know the tactics of your Church: it clamours for Toleration and it labours for Supremacy. I see that you are prepared to persecute;' and then, after drawing a strong contrast between his own unaided position and O'Connell's extorted appliances for power, he wound up with the magnificent boast, 'We shall meet at Philippi, where I will seize the first opportunity of inflicting castigation for the insults you have lavished upon me.' Having discharged himself of this diatribe, some of the worst parts of which we have omitted, Mr. Disraeli wrote a letter to Mr. Morgan O'Connell, in which he expresses a charitable hope that he has so insulted his father that some member of the family must come forward and avenge him. The sons of O'Connell, however, looked on the matter as purely ridiculous; and they only published the correspondence

in the papers. The public were much of the same opinion. They indulged in a good hearty laugh at the Cambyse's vein of the would-be champion of Conservatism. His political inconsistency was ascribed to an infirmity of judgment, almost amounting to craziness. The extreme rashness and injudicious haste of Mr. Disraeli to achieve greatness had excited strong prejudices against him, until even his power and originality were undervalued. He had, perhaps, never stood lower in public esteem than at this time. His immediate history had embraced only a series of defeats, of preposterous efforts, and ridiculous failures; and his final boast that he and the Agitator would meet at Philippi—that is to say, in the House of Commons—was considered as the climax of his absurdity. The public were not more deceived than he was himself as to the real nature of his powers; and we shall find that it was not very long after he had reached this culminating point of his folly, that he began to develop those powers which have since made him famous.

Mr. Disraeli experienced a great and well-deserved difficulty in obliterating all traces of his pretended Radicalism of the year 1832, when he had finally flung himself into the ranks of the Conservatives. A declaration of his, that he had never been a member of the Westminster Reform Club, drew forth an indignant counter-charge from a correspondent of *The Morning Chronicle*, who stated, that after he (Mr. Disraeli) had become a

member, he had neglected to pay his first subscription ; and that a correspondence having ensued between himself and the secretary, it resulted in his withdrawal from the club. And in reference to his attacks on O'Connell, he called up an antagonist even from the wilds of Ireland, who declared that, within a month of Mr. Disraeli's speech at Taunton, he had spoken to him (the writer) in terms of extravagant praise of the Agitator, and had requested him to convey his kind remembrances to him. In fact, he was fairly beset on all sides—was never, perhaps, in his life so delightfully occupied in universal pugnacity. His troubles, however, were not over. In the course of the same year, towards its close, he published a brief work which he entitled *A Vindication of the English Constitution*. Had he always written with the same concentration, spirit, and judgment, which characterised this book, he would long before have attained a distinguished position among contemporary politicians. To enter into any analysis of this work would exceed our limits ; but while speaking of Mr. Disraeli as a political writer, it may be as well to mention, that at a period anterior to any we have yet touched on, Mr. Disraeli figured in the capacity of editor of a morning newspaper, published under the auspices of the renowned John Murray, and called *The Representative*. It was an abortive undertaking, which not even the genius of a Disraeli could inspire with vitality. The birth, staggering life, and death of this weak offspring of speculation,

with the quarrels it occasioned among all who were concerned in it, would itself form an amusing chapter in any new edition of the *Curiosities of Literature*. These events, however, are too remote to have much bearing on Mr. Disraeli's present political character.

The *Vindication of the English Constitution* was, like most of Mr. Disraeli's writings after the year 1834, consistent with those principles which, as we have already hinted, had been shadowed forth from time to time by him. Whether for its historical illustrations or its style, it was not an effort to be despised; and the time will probably come when it will have acquired a still greater literary interest and value. Its immediate power was shown in the virulent anger of the Whigs against the author. It produced an amusing episode in Mr. Disraeli's life, the last, with one exception, in which we shall have occasion to speak of him with even the shadow of ridicule. The Whig party commissioned one of their organs to attack Mr. Disraeli; and towards the close of the year 1835, there appeared a leading article in *The Globe*, couched in language mild enough, but which, besides embodying an attempt to quiz Mr. Disraeli on his many salient points, distinctly charged him with having endeavoured, in 1832, to become one of O'Connell's tail. This was the old Wycombe story over again; but it was revived at a period when it was supposed that it would be peculiarly annoying to Mr. Disraeli. The attempt was so far successful, for it put him in a great

passion, and he let himself down so low as to write to *The Times* newspaper a letter, in which, forgetting all his satirical power, which would have enabled him effectually to sting his opponent, he applied language to the editor of *The Globe*, which was only forcible because it contained the raw material of abuse. Forgetting that he had himself been a writer of newspaper leaders, he speaks of the editor as ‘Some poor devil paid for his libel by the line,’ adding, that ‘the *thing* who concocts the meagre sentences, and drivels out the rheumy rhetoric of *The Globe*, may be a senator in these queer times, or he may not ;’ and much more pointless virulence of the same sort. In this letter he supplies an answer to the charge of inconsistency which he seems before to have forgotten ; for in excusing himself from the imputation of wanting to be one of O’Connell’s tail, he urges that in 1832 he had no tail, and adds, that in that year he was a very different man from what he had since become ; that he then spoke with respect of the Protestant institutions of the empire, but now (that is to say, in 1835) he was actively engaged in undermining them. Mr. Disraeli, however, had not got rid of his bad taste—had not yet learned how to abstain from the indulgence of passion, or how to give that fine polish to his sarcasms by which he has since become so formidable. The unhappy writer in *The Globe* is throughout mauled ferociously. Of him Mr. Disraeli says, ‘The editor’s business is to chalk the walls of the nation with praises of his master’s blacking ; only it is ludicrous to see

this poor devil whitewashing the barriers of Bayswater with the same self-complacency as if he were painting the halls of the Vatican.' Mr. Disraeli would not write or speak such a sentence as this now. He has taken higher flights, surcharges his sarcasms with more venom, and less gall. A long newspaper controversy ensued between the parties, which was kept up on both sides with unabated ill-temper, Mr. Disraeli having decided advantage in the employment of abusive language. Towards the close of the controversy Mr. Disraeli's vanity flashed out brilliantly. The editor of *The Globe* had pompously declined to go any further into the subject, because he would be only gratifying his antagonist's passion for notoriety. This was a home-thrust, and it told. Mr. Disraeli answered, 'How could he be gratified by an ignoble controversy with an obscure animal like the editor of *The Globe*, when his own works had been translated, at least, into the languages of polished Europe, and circulated by thousands in the New World?' This last vigorous blast on the accustomed trumpet made John Bull laugh again, and gave the editor of *The Globe* a final advantage, which he secured by a judicious silence. At the commencement of this controversy, Mr. Disraeli begins by saying that he has often observed 'there are two kinds of nonsense—high nonsense and low nonsense.' This was rather an unfortunate observation, for a more apt description of his own style when his vanity was rampant, and he breathed his grandiloquent vein, could not

be found than in the phrase 'high nonsense.' In fact, a good satirical criticism of Mr. Disraeli might be formed by selections from his own works.

During the year 1836, and the early part of 1837, we find Mr. Disraeli still, from time to time, in a highly militant state; still dashing off much 'high nonsense,' but more often allying it with sound argument and intelligible views. His genius also now began to take a more practical turn. He was still ambitious of entering parliament; but perhaps some good angel had cautioned him that he had better wait till the effect of his former gyrations had become somewhat obliterated from the public mind. A letter of his, addressed to the Bucks freeholders, upon some then impending changes in the law, excited attention, and was thought highly of, because it was free from 'high nonsense,' and took an intelligible view of its subject. During this interval, also, some letters of the *Junius* order appeared in *The Times* newspaper, signed *Runnymede*, which were universally attributed to his pen, although not distinctly acknowledged by him. Internal evidence fixes the authorship. They exhibit power, weakened by flippancy; historical illustrations perverted to serve party purposes; and frequently the most happy sketchings of personal character, and felicitous exposures of political shortcomings, with here and there a dash of almost insolent smartness, which gave them a raciness infinitely relishing to the reader. Their general principles are mainly consistent with those contained in former manifestoes

by Mr. Disraeli. There is the same virulent opposition to Whiggism, and the same exaltation of old Toryism.

At length, towards the close of 1837, the grand object of Mr. Disraeli's efforts was achieved. His political wanderings brought him to Philippi. He was returned to parliament for the borough of Maidstone. Much curiosity was felt to witness his *début* as an orator. It cannot, with truth, be said that any very high expectations had been formed; and those who knew him, or had at all studied his character, did not scruple to predict the result. There had been throughout his public life such a contrast of strength and weakness, of power and extravagance, such a want of self-government, so many failures and so many successes, that people were puzzled what to think. Mr. Disraeli's eagerness for display left them not long in suspense. His was not a spirit to submit to training, to study the character of his audience, or learn the arts by which they were to be propitiated. Nothing would serve him but a brilliant and immediate triumph. He must be all, or nothing. In one of his prefaces he describes youth as the season when we live in reveries of magnificent performance. His youth had, in this sense, lasted long beyond the usual age of intellectual maturity; and now was come the hour for the magnificent performance. Now he was to burst upon the world as a great and accomplished orator, just as he had before astonished mankind as a novelist, poet, and political writer. He was

to spring to the summit at one bound. He came, predestined to rule the senate by his eloquence, predetermined to head a party of his own. Besides, he had to fulfil his challenge to O'Connell—he had sworn to extinguish the most powerful man of his day. Within a very short time of his election he rose to make his maiden speech. He anticipated a signal triumph; he accomplished a most ridiculous failure. He can now afford to have this event recorded, because he has since attained such eminence; but he would not have done so had not there been an almost total change in the construction of his mind—if the atmosphere of exaggeration in which he had so long lived had not been dispersed, so that he could obtain a clear vision of the real world around him. It is impossible to say what this first speech, which was, no doubt, well prepared beforehand, would have been if heard at length, because the risibility of the House was so much excited, partly by the matter of the speech, and partly by the peculiar manner of the speaker, that they would not let him proceed, but interrupted him with bursts of merriment, such as are seldom indulged in *at* a speaker. He has since acquired the art of making them laugh as loudly *with* him. He was so assailed with ridicule as he went on, from flight to flight, in language the House could not understand, that when he came to what should have been his peroration, but which he violently tacked on to the fragments of the main body, he utterly broke down, and was compelled to resume his seat

amidst convulsions of laughter. The fact was, that the speech was utterly inappropriate to the occasion and to the subject. The style was altogether too ambitious, the images too high-flown for a beginner, more especially one who was already staggering under the weight of *Alroy* and some kindred follies. His vaulting ambition had, indeed, o'erleapt itself; and his 'other side' seemed at the time to be a bottomless pit of bathos.

There was one passage, which he ejaculated with almost the energy of despair as he sat down, that deserves to be recorded, because, whether it was a deliberate opinion, or whether it was only a mere angry spasm of exasperated vanity, it was still a singular prophecy. He said, with almost savage spirit, amidst the shouts of laughter which drowned his sentences,—‘I have begun several times many things, and have often succeeded at last. I shall sit down now, but the time will come when you WILL HEAR me!’ This was looked on at the time as the empty boast of a conceited man—another flash in the pan of the same order as his earlier ones; but time proved that he had an instinctive sense of his own powers.

IV.

WITH the egregious failure recorded in the last section, ends our record of the mistakes of Mr. Disraeli's ambition. It would almost seem to have startled him into a consciousness of the great error

that had obstructed his previous career. Without being able to vouch for the fact, we would confidently hazard the assertion, that he must have submitted his mind from that time to a most rigorous discipline—that he ceased to rely so wholly as he had done on his own impulses, and determined to acquire a mastery of those parts of the art of oratory which are not immediately dependent on the inspirations of the mind, but without which the finest ideas are useless. For some time after his first speech he remained comparatively silent; nor did he, for a year and a half afterwards, take any prominent part in the debates. When he again made an effort of magnitude, a total change seemed to have come over him, although he had not yet reached to anything like the skill he afterwards displayed. He dropped his grandiloquent style, but kept his original ideas and forcible language; he made no ambitious efforts to work either on the passions or on the imagination; his manner grew quiet and collected; he was more argumentative than declamatory; and his speeches became not only coherent in sentiment but also symmetrical in form. In July, 1839, he began to make a favourable impression on the House. He delivered a remarkably sensible and powerful speech, in which he explained that the demands of the Chartist, although they aimed at the attainment of political rights, were really the offspring of social wrongs; and he declaimed, with vehement eloquence, against the growing tendency of our government and legislation towards centralisation, and against the govern-

ment of the country being virtually entrusted to the middle classes. It was now that he began also to propound in some intelligible shape, not in the flighty, flashy, metaphorical style of former years, his doctrines as to the true interests of the nation. He entered, on more than one occasion, his solemn protest, retrospectively, against the attempts of the Whigs to obtain, through the medium of the Reform-bill, a permanent grasp of the electoral power. Those who had read some scattered passages in Mr. Disraeli's earlier writings, and who remembered the grounds he at the time alleged for starting in public life on the Radical interest, were struck with the fact that the prophecies he then made had only not been fulfilled because the reaction of Conservative feeling had been strong in proportion to the attempts of the Whigs to exercise their power. But Mr. Disraeli had, in the meantime, elevated his views beyond the narrow sphere of party influences, and had consolidated in his own mind a scheme of policy which he had often before shadowed out, in which hatred of the Whigs was rendered secondary to a desire to bring about a closer alliance between the old aristocracy of the country and the industrious masses. He called upon the latter to yield the right of government to the former, on condition that they should be responsible for their social welfare, on principles of legislation which he proclaimed not to be new, but to have been only in abeyance. A favourite aphorism with him at this time was, that 'the aristocracy and the labouring

population constitute the nation!’—the same fundamental principle which he has endeavoured to set, in a more attractive form, before the public in later years, in his novels *Coningsby* and *Sybil*. In pursuance of this scheme, which is still held by a majority of living statesmen to be only the crotchet of a political enthusiast, Mr. Disraeli invariably made a somewhat ostentatious display of his sympathy for those Chartists who were punished for the alleged political offence of holding opinions regarding the rights of the multitude different from those of their superiors. One of the best speeches he made in this interval of parliamentary regeneration was on behalf of Lovett and Collins, whose case he took up on high constitutional grounds, disdaining all call for mercy on the part of the State, and asserting that they were in fact the aggrieved parties. This was in the year 1840. During 1841 he spoke with more frequency, and grew gradually in the good-will of the House, till he effaced the recollection of his first failure. His speeches on the Copyright and Education questions, in particular, were much admired, and he showed unexpected debating powers in an attack he made on the Whig ministry just before their final downfall.

Throughout these years he repeatedly enforced in parliament, as also in his various writings, those ideas of political and social reform which are known as ‘Young Englandism.’ Identity of sentiment and opinion between him and Lord John Manners, Mr. Smythe, and some few others, led them to

form a little party of their own in the very heart of the Conservative ranks ; and of this party, such as it was, Mr. Disraeli, by common consent, was made the leader. Thus was his early ambition so far gratified. He was the head of a party—to be sure, it was only a little one—and was the target for all the spare ridicule in parliament and in the press. But still power and royalty, in any shape, are delicious to ambitious minds ; and a nucleus, however small, may always be made a rallying point. Something of a prophetic spirit seems to have led his imagination to conceive the sort of character he afterwards acted with in Lord John Manners, and which he has striven to embody in his later novels. In the *Revolutionary Epic*, amidst much bombastic common-place, there is sketched the portrait of a nobleman, for which Lord John Manners, and some few others of his class, might have sat :—

‘ This man, thus honoured, set apart, refined,
Serene and courteous, learned, thoughtful, brave,
As full of charity as noble pomp,—
This pledge that in the tempests of the world
The stream of culture shall not backward ebb,—
This is the noble that mankind demands,
And this the man a nation loves to trust.’

In the early part of 1842 he girded himself up to a great task,—one to which he proved himself quite equal. We allude to his long speech on our consular establishments abroad,—a speech which did not receive its full meed of approval at the time. It was, ‘ Pooh-poohed !’ by Lord Palmerston, and treated with indifference by Sir

Robert Peel. It is more than probable that Sir Robert thus early wounded the vanity of his aspiring follower, and so laid the foundation for his subsequent memorable hatred. If, however, Mr. Disraeli was conscious of such feelings at the time, he did not give them utterance; for during the whole of 1842 and 1843, he spoke frequently in general defence of Sir Robert Peel's policy, more especially his free-trade measures, which he justified on the ground that they were fully in accordance with the unrealised policy of Pitt. His speeches during these years were full of information, of bold views, of striking historical illustrations, and were generally so well sustained as to be quite refreshing after the commonplace argument of ordinary speeches, where ideas were constantly reproduced by one member after another, but few adding any to the common stock. Still, up to this time, Mr. Disraeli could scarcely be said to have achieved any triumph as an orator. The utmost he had effected was to have recovered himself from the absurd position in which he had originally placed himself.

But with the year 1844 came a very different state of things. From an early period in the session of that year Mr. Disraeli began to develop parliamentary powers, of an order far higher than any he had exhibited before. He took and maintained a position in the debates of the House of Commons, which was in itself sufficiently distinguished, but which became still more remarkable when contrasted with his early failure as a speaker.

Of all the men of talent in that assembly, he was the very last who could have been expected so to have undermined Sir Robert Peel. The parliamentary reputation of the right honourable baronet appeared to be so consolidated; he was looked up to with such universal respect, if not as a statesman, at least as a debater; he had so often withstood the shocks of heavy artillery, and the deadly aim of rifle practice, from established orators, that the shafts of Mr. Disraeli's ridicule, however pointed or envenomed, might have been expected to fall dead and blunted at his feet. But it was not so in fact. Mr. Disraeli managed his attacks with such skill, and aimed his blows with such precision at the weak points of his distinguished adversary, that his triumph, as far as mere debating was concerned, became complete. So singular a chapter in parliamentary history deserves to be entered upon in detail. But before doing so, it may be as well to pause for a few moments, that we may point the moral of the foregoing pages. The reader will scarcely have failed to perceive what, if we had entered still more into detail, we should have made still more apparent, that all Mr. Disraeli's failures, whether in literature or in politics, may be traced, on the one hand, to an exaggerative temperament, which led him to take false views of the realities around him, and to over-estimate his own power of coping with this imaginary creation; and, on the other, to his having perpetually invoked, towards the accomplishment of the most simple and commonplace

objects, intellectual faculties which, even in their perfection, are only required for the most capacious designs and the most grand events. During the whole of his earlier career he seems never to have had any one practicable end in view, but to have been perpetually deceived by *ignes fatui* of his own imagination, till he really believed that he was combatting realities. We have seen that these ill-regulated efforts produced perpetual fear and suspicion in the public mind; that no reliance whatever could be felt on the conduct of one who seemed so little to understand the common conditions of success; that even where he anticipated his contemporaries in his judgments, his vaticinations were looked at as the ravings of an enthusiast; and that, while possessing talents which were admitted to be such as few men are gifted with, all his offers of support to existing parties were rejected with contempt, until he became a sort of foundling of the political world, in whose case every one certainly felt interested, but whose connexion every one repudiated. From the moment, however, that he sets up for himself tangible and practicable aims; proportioning his efforts to his powers and to the customs of his contemporaries, training and disciplining his mind in recognised formularies, and perfecting his talents by comparison and emulation with established models; all that was wild, visionary, and in some respects ludicrous in his former proceedings becomes obliterated from the mind; until, having discarded all that brass which he in vain strove to

make pass for current coin, he is enabled, out of what is really a small portion of sterling capital, to accumulate so large a proportion of influence and fame. His career is, in fact, at once an example and a warning. Whatever indulgence might have been extended to his very early extravagancies, it was unpardonable in a man who had proved his possession of such talents, that he should have reached the age of two or three and thirty—a period of life at which some of the greatest productions of genius have been perfected—without having acquired even that average self-knowledge and judgment which it is the privilege of almost the meanest persons to possess, if not actually of unsound mind. Indeed, when it is remembered that Mr. Disraeli's reputation has always been built on his satirical powers, and that its climax has only been attained by the perfection of his attacks on Sir Robert Peel, we do not know that he ought to be allowed to escape so easily from the reprehension due to his former follies.

Mr. Disraeli's attack on Sir Robert Peel was very sudden,—so sudden as almost to preclude the belief that he was actuated by public spirit, or, indeed, by any other feeling than one of personal enmity. Into the more common insinuations against Mr. Disraeli, that he had asked for a place and had been refused by the government, we do not think it necessary to enter. The facts are not established, nor has there been any direct assertion or denial by the parties. We would rather seek for causes quite as natural, though not so obvious.

Sir Robert Peel, being essentially a practical statesman, sought, as the agents of his policy, men of a practical turn of mind. Sir Robert Peel, like most practical men, hated 'ideas,' or rather, he estimated them not by their abstract truth, but by their capability of being realised in party action. He altogether undervalued Mr. Disraeli's talents; looked upon him as an unsafe ally, who might, by chance, hit with a random shot, but who could not be depended on for steady purposes and aims. He had, on many occasions, treated the aspiring regenerator of his age with marked indifference, if not contempt. Secure behind his rampart of past parliamentary successes, he despised one whom he never expected to head an assault. It is possible that this cold affectation of superiority stung the natural self-esteem of Mr. Disraeli, conscious of his undeveloped capabilities; and that, long before he was in action an open foe, he was in heart a secret enemy. Political hatreds, like those of private persons, are too often only the rankling wounds of self-love.

In two short months was Mr. Disraeli's ostensible support of the Conservative minister changed to scarcely disguised opposition. Political events had, in the interval, furnished him with a pretext for his animosity. But, in the month of February 1844, Sir Robert Peel could have had no suspicion, if, indeed, he would have taken any care, that he would so soon arouse so formidable an opponent; for in that month, on the opening of the session, Mr. Disraeli was still a not inactive supporter of

Sir Robert Peel. He spoke of him incidentally as a minister of great ability and great power; and delivered an eulogium upon him for the admirable manner in which he had reconstructed his party, in which, when he said, 'that every thing great is difficult,' he must have meant that the accomplishment of so difficult a task was the proof of greatness. He further expressed his conviction, that if Sir Robert Peel would propose great measures the public would support him; that it was for him to create public opinion, not to follow it.

Mr. Disraeli's public support became converted at so early a date as the following April into scarcely disguised opposition, and for two years and a half he devoted himself, with an unparalleled perseverance, to the task of torturing and exasperating, in every possible way, the man on whom he had formerly lavished his praises. Let us glance at the temptations which Sir Robert Peel's personal and political conduct afforded to so accomplished a satirist.

V.

THE systematic attacks of Mr. Disraeli, not merely on the politics, but also on the reputation, character, and personal bearing of Sir Robert Peel, are without a parallel in modern parliamentary history. There was a strong dramatic interest attaching to them, which we look for in vain in the more courteous and forbearing practice of contem-

porary party warfare. The popular maxim of 'Measures, not Men,' has so imbued the minds of the leading speakers with a vague liberality of sentiment, that they are with but few exceptions, sparing of personalities, and disposed, when they do indulge in them, to wrap them up in kindly circumlocution. Statesmen do not meet each other, face to face, as personal antagonists, but rather fight by demonstrations made under cover of the principles of their party. If we except some few scenes towards the close of the life of Mr. Canning, and the contest between Mr. Secretary Stanley and Mr. O'Connell (in neither of which cases were extremes of personality indulged in), nearly half a century has elapsed since there was a case of such a sustained determination on the part of one public man to destroy another, on avowedly personal grounds.

Rightly to estimate the value and understand the sudden acceptance of the series of sarcasms, aimed, with so deadly a force and effect, at Sir Robert Peel, we must recal to mind the position of the Conservative premier at that time. His unparalleled and unexpected success as a minister, and the power, almost dictator-like, which he wielded over an obedient House of Commons, in the general paralysis of party produced by his own skilful manœuvring—these, and other circumstances of a more personal nature, had stimulated the egotism which was always a feature in his character, until it almost absorbed his better judgment. He had now, for nearly four years, held absolute

sway over the country, and, by whatever means, had made his will not merely the law of parliament, but also that of public opinion. During all his former life he had worn that mask of subserviency to even uncongenial opinions, which, in a representative legislature, is one of the conditions of what is called leading party, and, therefore, of obtaining power. Hated during three-fourths of his career by the growing majority of his countrymen, his talents sneered at, his character aspersed, he had now raised himself to that proud position in which he was all but regarded as the Trustee of the Nation,—was even almost the Man of the People. Here was enough to unsettle the most philosophical mind; but over a spirit whose ardour had been greatest, perhaps, when most repressed, and whose ambition, not confined to mere political conquest, extended to the achievement of great social triumphs, its influence might well be all but intoxicating. There was yet a more immediate and exciting stimulant to self-esteem. But a short period had elapsed after Sir Robert Peel's accession to power, when one of the chief territorial lords, who was the recognised leader of the agricultural body, had fulminated an arrogant warning to the minister, that they who had brought him into power could, if he were not their political tool, turn him out again. Sir Robert Peel, with the hereditary pride of a manufacturing aristocrat, might feel resentment at this threat from an antagonist of what, though of so recent origin, he yet might consider his 'order.' What wonder, then,

if the minister, who was now almost worshipped by the middle classes, finding that by the breath of his mouth he had scattered to the winds the power that had fortified this boast, should at times be carried away by a proud exultation, till, in an exaggerated egotism, he sometimes forgot what was due to an assembly in which all are, nominally at least, on an equality? He certainly presumed, from time to time, though, perhaps, unconsciously, on his position, gave himself autocratic airs, and talked too much in the 'I and my King' style. The excessive labour and anxiety he underwent, acting on impaired physical powers, produced an irritability of temperament which he could not control, and, on more than one occasion, it burst forth in a manner so violent as to require from the House all their forbearance and respect. He also acquired, from his singular success, a habit of arrogating to himself an elevation of sentiment, and a degree of moral purity, which was scarcely compatible with his actual position; and the House of Commons were thus forced, almost reluctantly, to remember that the legislative triumphs upon which all his implied boasts were based had been gained at the expense of a flagrant, and, except in his own career, an unparalleled inconsistency. Further, it should be remembered, that although, by playing off parties against each other, he had the House of Commons at his feet, still, as a statesman, he was isolated. With the exception of his own immediate clique, who, for the most part, owed their political elevation to his favour, he had, perhaps, no

honest friends in the House but the Radicals. The Tories hated him for past and prospective treachery; the Whigs, though forced to affect lip-honour, were jealous that he should have stepped in to defraud them of their well-earned leadership of the middle classes. Thus, to a bold assailant, it was clear that he might have an audience not indisposed to sympathise with him in any well-aimed attacks on Sir Robert Peel, so soon as the slightest symptoms should appear of a decay in his popularity and power, or so soon as some great movement, either in or out of parliament, should force the minister to abandon his manœuvring and come boldly out into the open field. All these considerations were, no doubt, noted, from time to time, by Mr. Disraeli, to be acted upon in furtherance of his own designs; but a stronger spur may be found in the scarcely restrained contempt shown by Sir Robert Peel towards some of the most brilliant of his supporters, and more especially to that very able, but sensitive personage, the member for Shrewsbury.

Mr. Disraeli began his assault with much caution. He did not allow his vindictive purpose to be seen in the first instance. Satiated, perhaps, with his leadership of the Young England party, he thought he saw a favourable opportunity, in the growing antagonism between the ministry and the agriculturists, for attaching himself to a much more numerous and influential body, who might, in some future organisation of parties, attain to power. It is due to him, also, to say, that of late

years the opinions he advocated assimilated him more with those who afterwards were called the Protectionists, than with any other party. In proportion as the suspicions, and ultimately, the hatred, of that party became concentrated on Sir Robert Peel, he was able to make his passions jump with his principles, and gratify his revenge while consolidating his influence. But the first speech in which he began to show his sarcastic power, and to sneer at the then Dictator of the House of Commons, contained nothing of the bitterness which so distinguished his later attacks. There was at that time no open rupture between him and the premier, although it was then generally rumoured that a cause had arisen in secret, in consequence of the refusal of Sir Robert Peel to employ Mr. Disraeli in the public service. He began with caution and a semblance of public spirit ; at first including Sir James Graham in his general strictures, and only quizzing Sir Robert Peel incidentally. His speech was on the subject of the Poor Law, and exhibited a singular sustentation and neatness. Though evidently intended by its author as a great effort, there was no extravagance or hyperbolical allusion ; there was none of that grandiloquence, or that straining after far-fetched and high-flown images, which had characterised Mr. Disraeli's early efforts. But there were sudden, sly turns of ironical humour, and the ridicule of Sir Robert Peel was so adroitly managed, as to be made to spring up in the mind of the hearer, rather than to be developed in the

actual words of the speaker. His manner, too, was not to be mistaken. It spoke more than the meaning of the words, and implied a studied offensiveness and contempt.

The total change that had taken place in the organisation of Mr. Disraeli's mind since his first appearance in parliament, was not more shewn in the superior tone and polish of his parliamentary speeches, than in the abstinence and self-denial which induced him to address the House at intervals so few and far between. Comparing the effect produced with the infrequency of the efforts, we are the more struck with his refinement of intellectual power. One or two, or, at the utmost, three great speeches in a session sufficed to set a-trembling the finely poised rock of the premier's parliamentary ascendancy. It is no argument against the merit of the speaker that all his apparent impromptus must have been carefully conned and prepared. Such laborious application will alone enable a man to carry off the great prizes in parliamentary warfare; and those who were accustomed to hear, as far as their convulsions of merriment would allow them, the sudden and startling points of humour and sarcasm towards which Mr. Disraeli was accustomed to work up the level argument or the irrelevant declamation of his speeches, will admit that not even Mr. Sheil himself could have introduced these gems into their setting with a more perfect command of the orator's handicraft. Half their force arose from their coming on the audience by surprise. So well was their approach

concealed, that whilst the apprehensive victim was writhing in suspense, he was robbed of the sympathy which his torture might have excited, by the audience being carefully kept in the dark as to the moment when the lash was to be laid on. It has been observed, that the actual sterling capital of ideas by which the effect was produced was comparatively small. No military commander ever knew better how to concentrate a small force upon a weak point, so as to supply the deficiency of great power. Mr. Disraeli seems to have ruthlessly anatomised the character of his antagonist, to have counted his vulnerable points, and to have set apart a sort of field-day for the attack upon each. Invective or raillery, denunciation or sarcasm, were by turns employed to expose the moral delinquency or the personal weakness of the object of the attack; and the fault was laid bare, or the failing held up to ridicule, with a precision and grasp of mind that was only exceeded by the singular polish of the language employed, and the apt choice of the exact moment when the exposure would most serve the purpose of the satirist. We shall fail to convey to the reader unaccustomed to study in detail the characters of public men, or to appreciate the tact with which the train was fired at the felicitous crisis, a clear idea of the effect of Mr. Disraeli's attacks, by a mere record of the points, aided as they were by his dramatic delivery. One very remarkable speech of his, towards the close of the session 1844, was at the time when, an adverse vote having been passed by the House

on the subject of the Sugar Duties, the ministry had murmured threats of resignation. The efforts of Mr. Disraeli to rouse the House from that state of degradation of which, not long before, on the Factory Question, they had given such startling proofs, were among the happiest efforts of declamatory power. It would be tedious to enumerate the many points of the speech; but the *animus* at once of the speaker and his party was shewn in the phrase, received with rapturous cheers, in which he characterised Sir Robert Peel, in his position of minister, as one who menaced his friends while he cringed to his opponents. Nor was he less happy when, with one stroke of his pencil, he described the solemn inconsistency with which a Conservative government had adopted a Whig policy, by denouncing the Peel administration and its moral pretences as an 'Organised Hypocrisy.' The value of Mr. Disraeli's points has always consisted in their universal applicability. They were not merely traps for the cheers of a party, but embodied propositions so obvious, in language so terse yet pregnant, that whatever might be the political opinions or predilections of individuals, they were compelled to subscribe to their truth, at the same time that they admired their power.

Long before the speech to which we have just referred, Mr. Disraeli had already acquired a kind of ascendancy in the House of Commons. It was not so much respect, as a mixture of fear and admiration, and a relish for his humour, enjoyed for a long time with something like compunction.

He had not, of course, the highest of political characters. His early extravagancies and inconsistencies were not wholly forgotten; nor was the palpable vindictiveness of his motives sufficiently veiled by his sounding pretexts of political principle. Therefore, even in the midst of the delirious excitement into which he at times threw the House of Commons, they retained a remembrance of the inadequacy of his provocation and the incongruity of his professions. But at last, assisted by circumstances, and especially by the increasing divergence of the policy of Sir Robert Peel from the line of his former principles, the envenomed art of Mr. Disraeli triumphed over these last faint promptings of moral reluctance. With the increasing attention and susceptibility of the House, grew the confidence and the ambition of this determined assailant. He changed his former weapons for others more difficult to handle; from single-stick to broad-sword his advance was not more rapid than from broad-sword to rapier and the poisoned dagger. In his earlier attacks he had still observed an ostentatious pretence of public principle; as he grew in temerity and success he flung aside this last mask of his revenge, and resorted to undisguised personality. A more safe mode of attack than to render the premier abhorred for alleged political turpitude, was to make him ridiculous on account of exaggerated personal talents. Not content with confronting Sir Robert Peel as a statesman, Mr. Disraeli sought to undermine him as an orator.

Here again we cannot hope to make the reader fully feel the then force and applicability of Mr. Disraeli's points. Between the end of 1844 and the spring of 1845 Sir Robert Peel, who had at first but ill-affected a lofty contempt of his antagonist, began to shew, by the notice he took of his attacks, that he at last recognised them as great parliamentary facts. To the magnanimous resolution with which Sir Robert strove to resist such admissions, let us bear the testimony of our admiration; but had he been made of adamant itself, he could not have ignored so persevering and powerful an enemy. We are not upholding Mr. Disraeli against the moral censure which may be assumed against him. Sir Robert Peel was, doubtless, at that time working out, at immense sacrifices of political character and personal ease, what he conceived to be a great mission, imposed on him for the good of his country. A more magnanimous enemy than Mr. Disraeli would have acknowledged and respected the difficulties of his position; but wounded vanity knows no conscience, and Mr. Disraeli spared no means, however repulsive, to effect his great object—that of irretrievably damaging the man who had slighted his claims. He had gained one point when he provoked Sir Robert Peel into a portentous refusal to 'bandy personalities' with him. Unfortunately for Sir Robert, those personalities were always linked with some well-aimed accusation, or with some happy criticism; and the very approval of the auditors who but a short time before would

have resented any attempt to insult their leading orator, amounted to a practical denial that they were personalities only. Mr. Disraeli met Sir Robert Peel's disclaimer only with an increased ingenuity of attack. He quizzed him unmercifully. There was not a failing that he did not hold up to ridicule. When Sir Robert Peel introduced the Bill for the increased grant to Maynooth, he rested his arguments less upon any broad scheme of policy which might have compromised him directly with powerful parties, than upon the fact that the principle had been sanctioned, though obscurely, by parliamentary authority. This gave occasion to Mr. Disraeli to make a hit at the premier, which was at once humorous and true. He said, that with him great measures were always rested on small precedents; that he always traced the steam-engine back to the tea-kettle; that, in fact, all his precedents were 'tea-kettle' precedents. It was in the same speech that he laid it down as a political axiom, that 'party was necessary to public liberty in a representative government; that a popular assembly without parties—in fact, five hundred isolated individuals—could not stand for five years against a minister with an organised government, without becoming a servile senate.'

This speech was more profusely studded with brilliant passages of sarcasm and rhetoric than any he had yet delivered. Protesting against the domination of the Duke of Wellington in the House of Lords, and of Sir Robert Peel in the

Lower Assembly, he said,—‘Another place (using the cant phrase of parliament) ‘Another place may be drilled into a guard-room, and the House of Commons may be degraded into a vestry,’—thus inferentially casting a slur on the ascendancy of the leader of the House of Commons; and then, soon after, he worked his allusion up to a climax by saying, that in place of all that they had been accustomed to honour in the shape of statesmen, whether of the past or of the present age, they had only got ‘a great parliamentary middle-man.’ And what was a middleman? alluding to the great curse of Irish agriculture. ‘He was a man who bamboozled one party and plundered the other, till having obtained a position to which he was not entitled, he cried out, ‘Let us have no party! Let us have fixity of tenure!’’ This was one of his most successful hits. But, with merciless pertinacity, he again assailed the irritated premier, startled out of his self-complacency. Sir Robert Peel’s influence as an orator had not been attained so much by the intrinsic value or beauty of his speeches, as by the consummate art with which he had organised and pressed into his service contingents unwillingly supplied from the most opposite sources. His parliamentary character rested more upon his course of action than upon his real eloquence. Mr. Disraeli had not failed to remember this great flaw; and he went on to characterise the speeches, through long years, of his antagonist, faithfully reported in Hansard, as ‘Dreary pages of interminable talk; full of predictions falsified,

pledges broken, calculations that had gone wrong, and budgets that had blown up. And all this not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, or a single happy expression.' This was a hard measure of criticism, but its novelty, if not its truth, met with immediate acceptance from the House of Commons, thus, for almost the first time, led to despise their long-worshipped oracle. His summing-up of the political tactics of Sir Robert Peel, one-sided as it was, could not but be admired for its concentrated vigour. He described it as 'a system so matter-of-fact, yet so fallacious; taking in every body, though every body knew he was deceived; a system so mechanical, yet so Machiavelian, that he could hardly say what it was, except a sort of humdrum hocus-pocus, in which the 'Order of the Day' was moved to take in a nation.' Those who can remember the mysterious concealment which preceded the announcement of Sir Robert Peel's great measures as a minister, and the astonishment and confusion which followed their disclosure, will be able to appreciate the refined satire of this point, the interest of which was necessarily evanescent. The peroration of the same speech was a powerful stimulant to those who conceived themselves injured by the desertion of their long-trusted leader. Mr. Disraeli called upon them to prove to Sir Robert Peel that 'cunning is not caution, nor habitual perfidy high policy of state;' and he wound up by exhorting them 'to dethrone a dynasty of deception, by putting an

end to this intolerable yoke of official despotism and parliamentary imposture.' It was in the same year that Mr. Disraeli made his happy illustration of the political inconsistency of Sir Robert Peel, in which he said that 'the right honourable gentleman had caught the Whigs bathing, and had run away with their clothes;' an illustration which, more humorous than refined, was immediately tangible by the popular apprehension. He also threw off an annoying allusion to that irritability which we have already said had become a failing in Sir Robert Peel; when he observed that he had spoken of some of these attacks 'in moments too testy for so great a man to indulge in.' But the unkindest cut of all was his sneer at one part of the oratory of the right honourable baronet in which he seemed to take great pride, when he advised him to 'stick to quotation; because he never quoted any passage that had not previously received the meed of parliamentary approbation.' These 'points' fall almost dead when repeated on paper. To see their sting it is necessary to throw yourself again into the scene, to recall the relative position of the parties, and to conceive the utter astonishment with which both the person attacked and the spectators witnessed, not merely the boldness of the assault on one hitherto deemed unassailable except by parliamentary equals, but also the novelty and the perfection of the means employed.

The session of 1846 brought Mr. Disraeli's parliamentary triumphs to their climax. He not

only displayed still greater debating powers, but he also took a much higher position than ever he had done before. Political events favoured him, by rendering it easy for him to continue, in all their virulence, his attacks on Sir Robert Peel, while he need not make so unblushing a display of his motives. His bitter personalities could now be passed off as indignant outbursts of outraged public spirit; nay, by a very large section of the House, and a respectable portion of the public, they were regarded as so many evidences of an active patriotism. The minister had now made venture of his last remnant of consistency: he had staked his all on a desperate hazard. Hitherto, however he might have been suspected of meditating a violent change of policy, he had kept, externally at least, some terms with the great majority of his followers. Long since identified in opinion and feeling with the opposition, he had still been regarded as the acknowledged leader of the Conservative party. So long, therefore, as Mr. Disraeli had continued to pour forth his bitter sarcasms against the man who was still ostensibly his leader, even his happiest efforts—those most ably masked—had something of the aspect of treachery. While admired for their talent, they were frequently condemned for their supposed malignancy, even by members of the Conservative party. But now the case was altogether different. Sir Robert Peel was openly denounced by the agricultural body as a traitor. Even the Corn-law Repealers and Radicals, al-

though they praised and profited by the boldness of his tergiversation, still did not attempt to deny that the complaints of the Conservative party were just. In this state of the facts, and also of the feelings of the House, Mr. Disraeli found opportunity, not merely for a greater licence of speech than he had hitherto indulged in, but also for more sympathy in his hearers, who before had condemned while they admired. In the speeches made by Mr. Disraeli during this year we do not find the same deliberate attempts to hold Sir Robert Peel up personally to ridicule, but we find much more bold language used in condemnation of his conduct as a statesman. The nature of the attack was now different; it rested on broader grounds. Mr. Disraeli had before sought to hold up Sir Robert Peel personally to contempt: he now sought to excite against him national indignation. On the very first day of the session he commenced his assault. Sir Robert Peel had delivered a very long speech; disfigured by some of his most prominent faults, and at the same time marked by much of that loftiness of tone which had given dignity and almost high eloquence to his later speeches; in which he had explained the circumstances attending his resignation and reappointment during the recess. He also explained at much length his reasons for proposing the repeal of the Corn Laws, affecting to undervalue the importance of his change of policy, and merging all considerations of political turpitude in the necessity there was for settling the

question. Mr. Disraeli delivered on this occasion one of his most brilliant and powerful speeches. Had all the advocates of protection discharged their parliamentary duty with the same vigour, pertinacity, and talent, as were shewn by Mr. Disraeli, Sir Robert Peel would not have found the passing of the Corn Bill so easy a matter as he did.

One hit in this speech was singularly clever and applicable at the time. Mr. Disraeli said, that he knew of but one parallel case to that of Sir Robert Peel, in his sudden desertion of his party. It was an event which occurred during the last war in the Levant. When that great struggle was taking place—when the very existence of the Turkish empire was at stake, the sultan of that day, a man of great energy and fertile resources, determining to make a last effort to maintain his empire, fitted out a great armament. It consisted of many of the finest ships of war that had ever been built. The crews were picked, the officers were chosen and selected with the greatest care, and they were rewarded before they fought. Such an armament had never left the Dardanelles since the days of Soliman the Great. The sultan embraced the admiral, all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedition, just as the muftis in England prayed for success at the last general election. Away went the armament to battle. But what was the consternation of the sultan when his lord high-admiral steered at once into the enemy's port! The lord high-admiral was like

the right honourable baronet in that instance, much misrepresented. He, too, was called a traitor. But he vindicated his conduct. He said, 'True it is I did place myself at the head of this valiant armada—true that my sovereign embraced me, and that all the muftis in the kingdom prayed for the success of the expedition. But I had an objection to war. I saw no use in prolonging the struggle; and the only reason for my accepting the leadership was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master.' It will readily be supposed that a parallel so apt as this, and brought forward at so happy a moment, was greedily accepted by the House of Commons. It was received with roars of laughter, and it completely counteracted for the time the effect of Sir Robert Peel's pompous declarations of his exalted motives in sacrificing his former principles. The same speech was full of cutting sarcasm and powerful invective. Every sentence teemed with thought, and the whole oration was delivered with a sustained energy of which only the most accomplished orators are capable. Among the many passages in which he attacked Sir Robert Peel, was one in which he indignantly denied his claims to be considered a great statesman. He defined a great statesman to be one who connects himself with some great idea, not a man who never originates an idea, but who watches the atmosphere, and, when he finds the wind in a certain quarter, trims his course that way. Such a man was as much a great statesman as a man who gets up behind a

carriage is a great whip. But the whole speech was full of points, highly pertinent to the occasion. Nor was it wanting in the old spirit of ridicule: Mr. Disraeli had one more fling at Sir Robert Peel's peculiarities as a speaker. For, alluding to the time when he was the leader of the Conservative opposition, and when he had no more ardent follower and panegyrist than Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, he speaks of him with oblivious contempt, as having presented the spectacle of a great orator before a green table, thumping a red box. In the following month, in a speech of almost equal power, Mr. Disraeli returned to the charge. In this speech he also embodied a striking argument in favour of the theory of governing by party, a system which, he contended, was a necessary part of the constitution, and was endangered by the manœuvring of Sir Robert Peel.

Mr. Disraeli's speech on the third reading of the Corn-bill was the most powerful and sustained of all that he had yet delivered. There were fewer of those ludicrous, satirical touches, which had so often convulsed the House before; but the whole speech exhibited an energy and sustentation not to be surpassed by any living speaker. A vein of satire ran through the principal parts of the speech,—not such satire as had enlivened his earlier efforts of the same kind; but, taking a higher range, as an attack on Sir Robert Peel's political character, this speech was, perhaps, the most dangerous and damning that the right honourable baronet had ever encountered during his long career.

It tore the mask from his plausibilities, and shewed him 'bereft of political consistency, of political honour, and even of personal talent commensurate with his lofty claims.' In a strain of bitter irony, Mr. Disraeli proceeded to acquit Sir Robert Peel of meditated deception in his adoption of free-trade principles, 'seeing that he had all along, for thirty or forty years, traded on the ideas of others; that his life had been one great appropriation clause; and that he had ever been the burglar of other men's intellects.' He also denounced him as the 'political pedlar, who, adopting the principles of free trade, had bought his party in the cheapest market, and sold them in the dearest.' The peroration to the speech was the most powerful effort of the sort Mr. Disraeli had yet made. It produced an effect upon the House, to which modern oratory is but seldom equal. Had a hurricane passed over them the excitement could not have been greater. The applause lasted several minutes after the speaker had resumed his seat. This was a great advance for Mr. Disraeli. He certainly had made the House feel with him on this occasion. They no longer looked upon him as a man who was prostituting great talents to the gratification of private malice, but rather as an interpreter of their own feelings, and as the avenger of the public wrongs of a great portion of their number. As the final catastrophe of Sir Robert Peel's administration drew near, the speeches of Mr. Disraeli grew more and more bold, his license of attack was less and less restrained. It is difficult, now

that the excitement has subsided, to understand how the House of Commons could have allowed such undisguised and acrimonious personalities to be indulged in, as those, which, at times, disgraced the speeches of Lord George Bentinck, while they disfigured those of Mr. Disraeli. The whole scene between Sir Robert Peel and his accusers, on the subject of the charge that he had hunted Mr. Canning to death, was an offence against parliamentary decency; and Mr. Disraeli is chargeable with having wilfully prostituted his great talents, not merely to the gratification of his own personal revenge, but also to the more base object of gratifying the revenge of others. While paying our full tribute of admiration to the extraordinary talent of the speech made by Mr. Disraeli on the 15th of June, 1846, we must protest utterly against such charges as were there made against Sir Robert Peel, being made the precedent for future attacks by those who may not so well know as Mr. Disraeli how to hide the more gross passions which dictated them under the flowers of rhetoric. The charge made against Sir Robert Peel of having garbled the report of a speech which he corrected for *Hansard*, in order to remove a stain from his political character, recoiled at once upon its promoters. But of Mr. Disraeli's share (and it was the principal one) in the attack, it is due to him to say, that it exhibited oratorical powers of the highest order, that even those who were most prepared to admire him, had not expected so bold a grappling with so difficult a subject as that which formed the theme of his

speech. The skill with which a veneration for the memory of Canning was made to cover a virulent animosity towards Sir Robert Peel, was without parallel in contemporary oratory, save, perhaps, in some of the earlier speeches of Brougham. Nor was Mr. Disraeli less successful in investing this personal contest with something of a lofty dramatic interest, in the excitement of which the paltriness and unworthiness of the actual charge was lost sight of. Still, such is the respect entertained by the House of Commons for the personal honour and integrity of Sir Robert Peel, that not even the extraordinary talent of Mr. Disraeli could make his ungracious cause palatable to the House—nay, the virulence, the almost savage eagerness he showed in his attack, went very far to lessen that growing favour which his public spirit and fearlessness had excited, and to throw him back to the position he formerly held, as the mere assailant, on purely personal grounds, of Sir Robert Peel. There was one passage in his peroration, however, which, besides a fine allusion to Mr. Canning's genius, fell with emphatic force upon his audience. Pointing to the impending fate of Sir Robert Peel as a minister, he said, that that statesman must feel that it was a Nemesis which would dictate the vote and regulate the decision they were about to give, and that it was a vote that would stamp with its seal the catastrophe of a sinister career. This was the last attack he made on his now fallen enemy. It is to Mr. Disraeli's honour that, either from a noble abstinence or a well-calculated tact, he ceased to

assail him from the moment that he was driven from office. He spoke several times after the accession of the Whigs to power, but he never uttered another offensive word towards Sir Robert Peel. It seemed as if he had devoted himself to the accomplishment of one great task, and, having succeeded triumphantly, he forbore to weaken the effect.

When the reader compares the extracts we have made, or even the whole of Mr. Disraeli's speeches, with our estimate of his parliamentary success, his natural impression will be that the right honourable gentleman's powers have been very much overrated. It will be supposed to be impossible that with so few assaults, and those partaking more of the character of exquisite skill than of great power, he should have been able so seriously to damage the parliamentary reputation of Sir Robert Peel, while so effectually advancing his own; but the singular pointedness and force given by the accomplished manner of Mr. Disraeli to even the most subtle touches of his sarcastic faculty, go far, when seen or made known, to explain away this apparent contradiction.

The effect of these attacks is matter of history. If they did not actually cause the downfall of Sir Robert Peel, they at least invested that event with an almost dramatic interest. They also placed Mr. Disraeli on a vantage ground in the House of Commons. He became one of the 'notabilities' of that assembly; and the party of which he then became the joint leader rose thenceforth into importance.

VI.

THE sudden death of Lord George Bentinck produced a total change in the position of the Tory or Country Party. Whether Mr. Disraeli seized on the leadership of that party, or whether he was elected to it,—whether, at first, he did or did not enjoy the confidence of those who were seemingly following his lead,—or whether, like another ‘adventurer,’ of our time, he first seized on it *vi et armis*, and afterwards obtained, by a sort of half compulsory vote, the sanction of those whom he had taken by surprise,—these are questions which much agitated the public at the time, but which have now lost their interest. Still, their contemporaneous discussion, while it consolidated, in one sense, the position of Mr. Disraeli, by stripping it of its fabulous or mythical character, also tended to the spread of prejudices against that gentleman in the public mind. To a policy of mere revenge had naturally succeeded a blind impulse of mere reaction. The new agitation tended to the planting of a fixed idea, and added to the difficulty of managing the unmanageable. The press used it as a means of annoyance to Mr. Disraeli, who was now made responsible for all the vagaries, all the statistical and economic blunders of his insubordinates; now threatened with deposition from his giddy and uncertain elevation, whither were to be raised the rampant Bœotians aforesaid. If a Nemesis had guided him to the destruction of the temporary ascendancy of

Sir R. Peel, so now like a spirit of fatalistic justice dictated his own punishment, and the means thereof. The ridicule, the sneers, the sarcasms, the damnatory quizzing, that had formed his weapons, were now employed against him in his turn. Get flogged with scorpions, put your head in a hornet's nest, turn Turk and try to increase the degree by adding to the quantity of your marital happiness, or be the premier of a falling party,—do anything rather than provoke the attacks of the witty and malicious satirists who furnish the public with their diurnal thoughts. Mr. Disraeli became the standing target of these gentlemen, who sought their weapons in a well-stored armory—in the extravagances of his past public life. Nor, in the divided state of his own party, did his as yet unrecognised claims obtain for him a timely support from their organs. Earnest, manly opposition he might have borne, as bringing with it an admission of his strength; but the harassing warfare of bush-fighting tactics taxed his utmost self-possession and courage. If the belief that he was born to be the leader of a party had not been strong within him, it would have been impossible that he could have withstood such assaults. The real strength of his tormentors lay in the absurdity of the idea (that is to say, in the public mind) that 'protection' could ever be restored. Mr. Disraeli was not yet powerful enough to destroy this lever by a bold disavowal of any such intention; and thus, while, from motives of prudence, he remained silent, he was successfully

saddled with all the ridicule attaching to the peripatetic Bœotian orators, the purblind red-tapists, and the mummy financiers of a bygone and buried system. He was like the man with the Turned Head—obliged to look hindwards when striving to go forwards.

The effect of all this quizzing was to implant in the public mind a notion of the utter absurdity of Mr. Disraeli's Leadership, retrospectively strengthened by the still greater absurdity of his ever obtaining office, or being entrusted with the conduct of any, even the most trifling, portion of the nation's affairs. The most muddle-headed relicts of squatting Toryism, men guiltless of an original idea, and who had passed their days in 'utter respectability,' were preferred to the brilliant and successful debater, the subtle and ingenious tactician. Mr. Disraeli's reputation for extraordinary talent very nearly ruined him.

The session of 1849 opened for Mr. Disraeli, under these circumstances, with no very cheering prospects. A man less sublimely self-confident would have shrunk from a position so doubtful and a duty so dangerous. But Mr. Disraeli is gifted in a remarkable degree with the quality of perseverance. The greater the apparent obstacle, the more determined his resolve that it shall be overcome. If the public mind was prepossessed with the idea that a great interest, once the predominant one in the country, was so utterly destroyed as even to be unable to stipulate for any conditions, but must still lie prostrate at the feet of its success-

ful foe—if the notion of a leader of such a party was, as a matter of course, hailed with ridicule and contempt, whether that leader were a man distinguished in the literary and political world, or the inheritor of one of the highest and most ancient titles in the country—the only adequate antagonists of such impressions must be countervailing facts. When such a party, and such leaders, had risen up from their supposed bed of death, and struck a blow, then, and not till then, would the public begin to believe in their continued existence. Mr. Disraeli set about his work with a tact and skill worthy of the most honoured parliamentary leaders, carefully avoiding to commit his party to any course of conduct for the sake of temporary triumph, which might necessitate subsequent retraction or tergiversation. The example of the fate of the last leader of a Tory Opposition was enough to warn off less powerful and popular chieftains from so dangerous a precedent. Mr. Disraeli laid his plan, and commenced his approaches, with much caution and prudence, and with a foresight which already presaged success. He saw in what lay the weakness of his party. He saw that the commercial policy of the country alone was not in question,—that his adversaries had gained their victory and maintained their ground, by associating with the name of Tory and landlord the imputation of sordid self-interest, and that, under the influence of this prejudice, the aristocracy were deprived of the advantage of the prescriptive claim which they derived from superior

education and position. The first thing necessary was to destroy all foundation for such prejudices; for the rest, he might trust to the good sense of the British people.

It was in March, 1848, that Mr. Disraeli first opened on the 'Manchester School' the battery which afterwards did so much execution in the ranks of their parliamentary disciples. It was in a debate on the proposal to renew the Income Tax (on March 10th of that year) that he first taunted Messrs. Cobden and Bright with having created a permanent deficiency in the revenue by forcing the new commercial system on the country.

In June of the same year (1848) Mr. Disraeli also took a very prominent position in the debate on the proposed repeal of the Navigation Laws. He sought to elevate the subject above the dead level of ordinary Opposition oratory. The House had been wearied with dreary and unintelligible statistics, and dull, stereotyped prophecies of national ruin. Mr. Disraeli touched a chord that vibrated with many who remembered the days of the elder orators, and even those when some now living giants in debate were young.

It was not, however, till the opening of the session of 1849 that Mr. Disraeli stood forward as the avowed leader of the Opposition. The fact seemed so strange and improbable, that men could not bring themselves to believe it. But there could be no mistake when Mr. Disraeli rose to move the amendment to the address, which he did in a singularly powerful speech, formed on the old

parliamentary models. But a short time had passed since the death of Lord George Bentinck. Feelings of friendship, delicacy, and subordination had led Mr. Disraeli to act as the lieutenant of that noble lord, even while his insight told him that a mere policy of revenge or reaction could never be advantageous to his party. But with the assumption of the leadership, Mr. Disraeli adopted a bolder tone and a more practical policy. He was now, too, officially recognised by Lord John Russell, as the accredited person with whom he, as Leader of the House, could make arrangements for the conduct of the public business. But Mr. Disraeli did not forget in his speech to pay a tribute to the memory of his departed friend.

In the same speech, Mr. Disraeli made a desperate onslaught on the Manchester School and their measures. He took occasion to lay the first stone of his new tactics by insisting on 'reciprocity' as being 'the first principle of tariffs.' 'Reciprocity,' he maintained, 'was the only principle on which a large and expansive system of commerce could be founded.' He denounced the existing system as wrong, because based on a different principle. 'You go on fighting hostile tariffs,' he said, 'with free imports—a course most injurious to the commerce of the country.' Thus far Mr. Disraeli, by implication, condemned the policy of 'reaction,' contending, not for the restoration of 'Protection' as a principle, but for what he conceived to be a measure of common justice and common sense, justified by the law of self-preservation. Mr.

Cobden's system of agitation was attacked with unsparing hand. Turning to his party, the new leader apostrophised them in words of comfort, which two years after were proved to be prophetic. 'Let us not despair!' he exclaimed. 'We have, notwithstanding all that has occurred—we have the inspiration of a great cause. We stand here, not only to uphold the throne but the empire; to vindicate the industrial privileges of the working classes, and the reconstruction of our colonial system; to uphold the Church, no longer assailed by masked batteries of appropriation clauses, but by unvisored foes;—we stand here to maintain freedom of election and the majesty of parliament, against the Jacobin manœuvres of the Lancashire clubs. These are stakes not likely to be lost. At any rate, I would sooner my tongue were palsied before I counselled the people of England to lower their tone. Yes; I would sooner quit this House for ever, than I would say to the people of England that they overrated their position. I leave these delicate intimations to the fervent patriotism of the gentlemen of the new school. For my part, I denounce their politics, and I defy their predictions; but I do so because I have faith in the people of England, in their genius, and in their destiny.' Here, it must be confessed, we have a kind of defiance to which our later politicians had not been accustomed. The agency called 'public opinion' in this country is the safest guide for legislators when that opinion is legitimately expressed; but when it is manu-

factured by agitating demagogues, it ceases to be public opinion, and it loses its immunities. Mr. Disraeli denounced the spurious article when, complaining that ministers had too much yielded to what was called public opinion, he said that, 'Public opinion on the Continent had turned out to be the voice of secret societies; and public opinion in England was *the clamour of organized clubs.*' It is not here that we would test the truth of these assertions. Our task is confined to the fitness of such a course of leadership for the then exigencies of the Tory Opposition; because we are here only trying Mr. Disraeli's claims, without involving ourselves in the vexed political question, whether recent events had not tended to justify and demand that the ground of contest should be shifted from an alleged struggle for rents and 'dear bread' to some principle more worthy the efforts of an ancient aristocracy. It is in this respect that we are led to concede to Mr. Disraeli the merit of having elevated the position of his party, and of having placed it above the range of the sneers of the smaller fry of antagonists.

VII.

MR. DISRAELI was now the *de facto* leader of the Tory Opposition, or Country Party, in the House of Commons. The position is brilliant and commanding. It has dazzled and gra-

tified the ambition of some of the greatest orators and most powerful statesmen of past and present times. Not to go too far up the stream of parliamentary history, there are the names of Pitt and Peel; men who laboured hard and long at their constitutional task, by their tactics and their oratory forging with patient toil the weapons wherewith they made the laws. For, the legitimate leader of an opposition must not be regarded as a mere partisan chief; although it is for him to lead the assault or to defend the breach. A man called by his party to that high and honourable post, and confided in by them while there, becomes an important and necessary part of the great constitutional machine. Besides his militant functions, he is the interpreter of the growing wants or the baffled wishes of at least a considerable portion of the community; the wisdom of our system providing that those wants and wishes shall be reduced to some practicable shape, so that the responsibility of new legislation shall fall on those who oppose the old, and thus the nation be never left without lawgivers and laws. The Leader of the Opposition, therefore, becomes *de facto* a ruler of the people, long before he is so *de jure*. If he rightly comprehends his mission, even his strategy must be prospective. Like a general manœuvring in a friendly country, he must never gain victory at too great a loss to the body politic. In wounding even his political adversaries, he runs the risk of too deeply injuring those who may one day be his friends, or

at least the object of his guardianship. If, to gain a temporary triumph, he makes too great an onslaught on principles, he unsettles the foundations of his future dominion. Therefore in his uttermost hostility there must mingle somewhat of prudent caution and paternal care. While a negative, not to say a fictitious policy will serve as a pretext for assaults, there must always be a positive policy in reserve. To harmonize these two, yet not disclose too much of either, demands tact, finesse, and political probity of no common order; at least in the present day, when political strife is no longer internecine, and the result of every fresh struggle adds to the arguments for systematic compromise. Here is but the outline of the qualifications required in a Leader of Opposition, not of the powers and qualities they imply. Eloquence, personal influence, tact, strategic genius, temper, foresight, magnanimity, knowledge, even to the minutest details,—how rare in their separate manifestation, and still more rare in combination!

In accordance with these views of the duties of the Leader of an Opposition, Mr. Disraeli's next movement was of a more practical character.

Assuming that the Leader of an Opposition must be prepared, not only with the purely strategic policy which is to gain votes, but also with some distinct and sound propositions on which he may rest the claims of his party to legislate hereafter, it will be useful to examine the nature of the motion made by Mr. Disraeli on the 8th of

March, 1849, which ultimately changed the attitude and prospects of parties. So long as 'protection' and 'dear bread' could be imputed to the Opposition as their party cries, they were sure to see a heavy majority arrayed against them: those views once abandoned, and a considerable portion of that majority lost the bond of cohesion. Upon some neutral ground, they might once more be appealed to as free agents. In this disposable portion of the House might be included a considerable number of county members and proprietors who were pledged to Free Trade, because they believed in the expansive power of British agriculture, and no inconsiderable portion of the independent Liberals, who were as little disposed to see the manufacturing class as the landed aristocracy in the ascendant. To these sections of the House Mr. Disraeli made a tacit appeal when demanding attention to the state of local taxation, and of the burthens on land. Basing his case on his faith in the common-sense and love of justice inherent in the British character, he claimed that the agriculturists, having been deprived by the late policy of the country of the protection they derived from import duties on grain, should be relieved from any and all burthens bearing exclusively on them, and for the imposition or retention of which that 'protection' had been made the justification. It is not here that we would discuss the specific value of such a proposition, being only engaged in the inquiry so far as to determine whether its adoption strengthened Mr. Disraeli's

claims as a tactician and Party Leader. Mr. Disraeli's case, true or false, was, that at present nearly the whole of the local taxation for national purposes fell upon the land, and that one-third of the revenue derived from the excise was unjustly levied on agricultural produce. The immediate effect of this claim on the House was not very great; but it was at once admitted that the Opposition had now something to go upon more legitimate than hatred to a name, or a mere blind impulse of reaction. The speech in which the new proposition was enforced, like all recent ones from the same source, aimed at higher objects than those immediately avowed. His previous attacks on the manufacturing interest had aroused its chiefs, and they already began to look on Mr. Disraeli as an antagonist, although at present not a formidable one. He denounced all attempts to legislate for or by a class (another step towards the good graces of the public,) and maintained that the prosperity of the entire nation depended upon the union and prosperity of all classes. Applying these views to the leaders of the Manchester party, he apostrophized them as having all in open chorus announced their object to be the monopoly of the commerce of the universe, and to make this country the workshop of the world. That system, and the system of the Tory party, were exactly contrary. The landed interest invited union. They believed that national prosperity could only be produced by the prosperity of all classes. But the Manchester school

preferred to remain in isolated splendour and solitary magnificence. ‘But believe me,’ he added, ‘I speak not as your enemy when I say, that it will be an exception to the principles which seem hitherto to have ruled society, if you can succeed in maintaining the success at which you aim, without the possession of that permanence and stability which the territorial principle alone can afford. Although you may for a moment flourish after their destruction—although your ports may be filled with shipping, your factories smoke on every plain, and your forges flame in every city, I see no reason why you should form an exception to that which the page of history has mournfully recorded; that you, too, should not fade like the Tyrian die, and moulder like the Venetian palaces. But, united with the land, you will obtain that best and surest foundation upon which to build your enduring welfare; you will find in that interest a counsellor in all your troubles, in danger your undaunted champion, and in adversity your steady customer. I wish to see the agriculture, the commerce, and the manufactures of England, not adversaries, but co-mates and partners—and rivals only in the ardour of their patriotism and in the activity of their public spirit.’ On July the 2nd, of the same year, on a motion to consider the State of the Nation, he obtained 156 votes against 296 given to the Government; and on the 20th of the same month, in speaking on Mr. Herries’ motion for a fixed duty on foreign corn, he made a rattling onslaught on Mr. Cobden,

in retorting upon him a recent charge, that his (Mr. Disraeli's) professions out of doors were inconsistent with those he made in Parliament. These pitched combats between the Tory leader and the chief of the Manchester school became now more frequent—a sure sign that the former was making way, and consolidating at the same time his own position and that of his party.

Thus, Mr. Disraeli had profited by his opportunities. His Leadership, however attained, was practically acquiesced in by at least 156 of his followers; he was recognised in his new capacity by the head of the Government, and he was attacked in it by Mr. Cobden. He had adroitly shifted the tactics of his party from an untenable to a tenable ground, and had made strides towards reconciling an estranged interest with the nation at large.

The session of 1850 was also one of advance for Mr. Disraeli. In the debate on the Address, he followed up the leading idea of his speech at the commencement of the previous session, but he developed it more boldly. The claim he set up for his party was embodied in the general demand for 'Justice to the land of England,'—to the owners, to the occupiers, to the cultivators,—to all persons dependent upon the land. It was now, too, that he attempted to turn the flank of the Manchester school, by adopting their principles, and making them serve his own purpose. Accepting one of the fundamental maxims of the politicians who profess to be guided by the principles of political economy—that the raw material of manu-

facture should be untaxed—he claimed for the land that it was the raw material of agriculture, and he demanded that this kind of raw material should be as free from taxation as any other. In the course of one of the most able speeches he had ever yet delivered, Mr. Disraeli proclaimed that, as far as his own convictions went, he still condemned the late change in our commercial policy. ‘A more perilous, and as he believed a more disastrous, experiment in politics never yet occurred.’ A bolder proposition still was that which followed, when he declared his conviction *that the land of England never did at any time depend for its fortune on any artificial law whatever*. In fact, by this time, Mr. Disraeli had acquired no inconsiderable ‘hearing’ in the House, while his own party surrendered themselves, as far as outward demonstrations went, entirely to his guidance. The cheers of the one, and the listening attitude of the other, tempted him sometimes to utter propositions a little too bold for an assembly whose members counted a slight knowledge of past and contemporary history among their legislative qualifications. Still, on the whole, there was moderation, tact, demonstrability, and ‘common sense’ in the general principle he laid down. Above all, there was novelty and a semblance of logical fairness, in accepting the principles of antagonists and arguing from them.

This speech produced a very striking effect, out of doors as well as in the House itself. The immediate result of its ingenious theory and bold

logic was, that Mr. Disraeli in less than three weeks after was able to rally 252 votes in favour of his motion for the relief of special agricultural burthens. The ministers obtained but 273 ; so that their majority, which the year before had been 140, was now reduced to 21.

Still, so strong is the prejudice of the English against new men, and so powerful was the influence of the antagonist faction, which had possession of the ablest and most widely-circulated organs of the press, that a result which would have been regarded as almost decisive of the fate of the ministry, had it been arrived at by a recognised pupil of party, or a leader who had laboured with patient mediocrity through a quarter of a century of hourly compromise and inconsistency, produced no adequate effect at the time upon the surface of political affairs. The public looked on as if it were only a phantasmagoria got up for their amusement ; and although they regarded the chief magician as a monstrously clever fellow, they still could not persuade themselves that his work was real.

Among thinking men and the chieftains of party, the effect was different. As for Lord John Russell, he saw at once the political significance of the result of the division. He sedulously went out of his way to treat Mr. Disraeli formally and officially as leader of the Opposition, thereby startling the complacency of the Grahams and Gladstones, and paving the way for a reinforcement of his strength by a future coalition with the displaced ministers. In the month of June,

when the Tories and the Grahamites combined to attack Lord Palmerston, Lord John Russell reproached Mr. Disraeli for having, although leader of the Opposition, permitted such a subject to be initiated by an independent member (Mr. Roebuck); and, on the 9th of July following, Mr. Disraeli received formal investiture in his office, by being called upon to second the address of condolence to the Duchess of Cambridge. Thus we find another session had still further advanced and consolidated the position of Mr. Disraeli; so much so, that it must be matter of wonder to any impartial person, how he could have failed to produce upon the public at large an impression in some degree corresponding to that which he had made within the House of Commons, and in the inner 'ring' of the political world.

The opening of the session of 1851 brought the later tactics of the Opposition Leader to their climax. In the interval since the dissolution, he had addressed some public meetings, and impressed on the agriculturists the broad features of his party policy; he had made them understand, that as they could not ask for a return to 'protection,' they might at least demand such a diminution of their local burthens as would enable them to produce more cheaply. In his speech on the 11th February, re-enforcing his propositions of the last two sessions, he distinctly declared that he had no idea of bringing back protection. He demanded that no gentleman would support him under the idea that his motive was an attempt to bring back

protection in disguise. *It was nothing of the kind.* He reminded the House that he had already declared that 'in that Parliament' he would make no attempt to bring back 'the abrogated' system of protection. These assurances, together with the doubtful position of the ministry on other grounds, procured for Mr. Disraeli 267 votes against 281 on the Government side; so that ministers were left in a majority of only 14. In 1849, they had defeated their new antagonist by a majority of 140.

It was quite obvious that matters could not go on thus. Yet, with an obliquity of purpose which can rarely be imputed to Lord John Russell, the minister declined to admit that he had sustained a legitimate defeat, in a fair contest, upon an intelligible proposition. The sole claim of the Whigs being that they were a Free-trade ministry, to have admitted that they were defeated by the party to whose blind hatred to Sir Robert Peel they had been indebted for office, would have been very seriously to complicate public affairs; more especially at a time when the Great Exhibition demanded as much tranquillity as possible. Ministers had a majority of 14 against 'justice to agriculture,' but the insignificant fact made no impression on their minds; they had a majority of near 400 on the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, but found it so inadequate, that they resigned. Even John Bull could not help seeing 'which way the cat jumped.' He perceived that the Whig ministry had been ignominiously defeated by the Tory champion;

and the 'great fact' thenceforth settled in his mind.

Emboldened by these events, Mr. Disraeli, in the earlier portion of the following recess, pushed his outposts a little further. He felt that he could now appeal with more confidence to the agriculturists than when he was only sketching a policy, or 'letting down' a party. He seemed to know that the duty of an Opposition Leader is to pull down, but only that he may hereafter build up; that party tactics may do very well for the assault, but that there must always be a positive policy in reserve. With the merits or demerits of this policy we have nothing to do, but much with its coherency and with its relation to its antecedents. Mr. Disraeli had formally abjured 'protection' as usually understood; but he had a sort of 'little go' of his own, calculated to re-assure the agricultural mind. The vote of the House of Commons, in the course of the past session, limiting the duration of the Income-tax to one year, furnished him with the groundwork of his scheme. He told the farmers that the question was not one of 'protection,' but of revenue, that the country would not go on paying Income-tax, unless it felt sure that the indirect taxation of the country would help to pay the national expenses,—that all they had to do was to claim such a reduction of burthens on land as would affect the revenue, and then the country would be compelled to assent to a low fixed duty on imports, in order to make up the deficiency. This, he told his audiences, would

be a natural and legitimate 'protection' to agriculture, without the odium attending a demand for dear bread. The most significant fact in connexion with this new scheme was, that several of the most respectable of the Tory county members voluntarily offered their adhesion to the new policy, in speeches addressed to their constituents.

When the parliament met for the session of 1852, the attitude of the Opposition was one of reserve. Mr. Disraeli confined himself to a general condemnation of the Reform Bill proposed by Lord John Russell, at the same time hinting that those with whom he acted were not opposed to the extension of the Suffrage, if that extension could be carried out on principles just to all classes of the community. Much anxiety was felt by the public as to the tactics of the Opposition, with respect to the great questions of commercial and fiscal reform, on which they had before taken the sense of the House. But circumstances rendered it unnecessary for them to enter into those questions. Lord John Russell was removed from power in consequence of an adverse vote of the House of Commons on a motion of minor importance, a vote moved by Lord Palmerston, the lately dismissed Foreign Secretary, and acquiesced in with chivalrous alacrity by the House; and the Earl of Derby was called upon to form an administration. Almost his first act was, to offer to Mr. Disraeli the high post of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Upon the whole, we may regard the position of

Mr. Disraeli as assured to him, by a right not often wielded in these days of nepotism and family compact—the right of conquest. For if ever there was a man who fought his way to the chief command in desperation, every inch of the ground he had to occupy disputed, that man is Mr. Disraeli. In 1837, hooted down as a bombastic enthusiast, nay, as almost a madman!—in 1851, elevated by his own perseverance and parliamentary ability, to the chieftainship of the most wealthy, powerful, and compact section of the aristocracy, and forcing the ministry of the day to resign!—to resign, after having been beaten in fair warfare on the intelligible proposition, that great injury having been inflicted on a class for the general good, the claims of that class to compensation and consideration should be entertained; the means of reparation to be supplied by a fair and full application of the same principles which had brought about the original deprivation. Putting party feeling on one side, and looking as impartial Englishmen on these facts, it seems impossible not to perceive that some systematic injustice had been done to Mr. Disraeli, if men who had done little or nothing were steadily exalted in the public estimation, while a man who had achieved so much had his pretensions pertinaciously ridiculed or gravely denied.

Then comes the question, by what right, beyond *de facto* possession, does Mr. Disraeli hold the position he has attained? A retrospect of the facts in the foregoing pages would seem to indicate that his claims are not inferior to those of most of

his predecessors. He found his party staggering under the weight of popular odium, as the selfish claimants of special class privileges to the detriment of the general interests. Fanatical rivals fostered deep-rooted prejudices and strengthened fixed ideas among the agriculturists, so that to all his protestations of more enlightened views, was opposed the fact that his party professed the old creed. The chief merit of Mr. Disraeli's tactics would seem to have been, that he softened the obstinacy of fixed ideas in the agricultural mind, by pointing out other channels than a return to 'protection' for the sense of suffering which, rightly or wrongly, existed there.

VIII.

REMEMBERING with what dread John Bull regards men of a poetical temperament, and how indispensable a dull calculating mediocrity has been held to be in one who would undertake the management of the public finances, it is not surprising that the first impression produced by the appointment of Mr. Disraeli to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, should have been one of hilarity rather than even of astonishment. With the single exception of Sir Robert Peel, there had been since the days of William Pitt a long and uninterrupted line of finance ministers, remarkable for nothing but plodding exactitude or ludicrous blundering. It had seemed as if the daring spirit

of the English had pursued them even in these appointments ; and that the finances of the greatest commercial nation in the world had been purposely left to the most incapable men, expressly to show how elastic and buoyant were the resources of the empire even under such an infliction. The general impression, when the lists of the new ministry made their appearance, was that Mr. Herries ought to have been the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. Disraeli have been put into any office not requiring application, financial genius, or habits of business. The public only showed itself, in this respect, what the public often is, a shortsighted public, prejudiced against a man of remarkable talent for the very reasons which ought to have made him respected. The journals in the interest of the liberal party generally were not slow to improve the excellent occasion offered by this prejudice ; and Mr. Disraeli was lampooned in every form known to journalism, long before the slightest ground had been afforded for a judgment as to his fitness. If he had been a dull mediocrity, a scion of some aristocratic house, or a connexion of some great city magnate, he would have been accepted as a matter of course ; but because he was only a man of genius, who had distinguished himself in literature, who had studied mankind in almost every clime and under almost every social aspect, who had raised himself within an incredibly short period from a depth of parliamentary bathos to the highest rank, amongst the orators of the House of Commons, and who finally

after successfully combating the favourite leader of that assembly, had so skilfully conducted his party as to have forced it into power many years before, in the ordinary course of things, it could have hoped to be there; because Mr. Disraeli had all these claims on the admiration and confidence of his fellow-citizens, he was prejudged unfit for a post which would have been yielded mechanically to the first nonentity who could add up the figures composing a budget.

Yet a little reflection would have satisfied the public that nothing was more natural or in accordance with precedent, than the appointment of Mr. Disraeli to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. In following through the preceding pages his career as leader of the Opposition, it will have been seen that he mainly rested his tactics on the necessity for some revision of taxation. Had he been the superficial and unsound person his adversaries proclaimed him, the temptation was enormous to a man of his temperament, and with such facility as an orator, to fall back on the old party topics, and endeavour to reinforce the cause he had espoused, by appeals to the sentimentalism of an eminently aristocratic nation. We know from a perusal of his literary works that he had constructed for himself a political theory, based in a great measure on these old historical topics. That he should in action have abstained from such day-dreams, and have adapted his conduct to the immediate wants of this working-day world, ought to have been accepted as an additional proof of his

sound practical sense. If Mr. Disraeli was clever enough to bring forward, while in Opposition, financial propositions which frittered away a good working ministerial majority, what conceivable reason, founded on justice and common sense, could there be for denying him the capacity to do similar things when in power?

Almost immediately on the re-assembling of Parliament, after a short adjournment, Mr. Disraeli had to exercise his new functions as leader of the House of Commons. Even his most inveterate censors must have admitted that he assumed and discharged those functions with an ease, dignity, and aplomb, rarely found among even the most accomplished of public men. We speak here not merely of the readiness, good temper, and self-possession manifested by him on all occasions, but also of the admirable tact with which he parried the fierce assaults of the opposition, alarmed at the prospect of an attempt to restore Protection, and inspired by a belief that any mode of warfare was justifiable, if that sacred thing, Free Trade, appeared in danger. His first assailant was Mr. Villiers; the paladin of Corn-law repealers, who with a well-affected apprehension that there was about to be reaction, called upon the Government for an immediate disavowal of protectionist opinions. Mr. Disraeli met the charge with mingled firmness and cunning. Referring to his own former declaration that he would never propose a return to Protection in the then parliament, he proceeded to say that the question was one he would not at all touch,

until after an appeal had been made to the country. The main position of the ministry he described to be, that the acts of 1846 had been hasty, partial, and unjust towards the landed interest; and that it was for the country to decide whether that injustice should be counteracted. As for Protection, he might gain popularity by proposing a small fixed duty on corn; this, however, he would not promise to do; but, on the other hand, he was not to be frightened into declaring that a small duty on corn was not as fair a mode of raising revenue as a small duty on any other article of consumption. Mr. Disraeli then proceeded to give a programme of the measures it would be his duty to propose; after which he wound up with a bold *tu quoque*, carrying the war into the enemy's camp, and as he had been asked what he would do, demanded what would be the policy of a Russell-Graham-Cobden cabinet? This last was a home thrust. It called up Lord John Russell; who taunted Mr. Disraeli with a want of frankness, and proclaimed the impossibility of a policy on the part of ministers which was to consist in standing still. Sir James Graham also fired up, and defended Free Trade, maintaining that it was impossible for any government of England to abstain from farther carrying out the great commercial system commenced by Sir Robert Peel. It turned out afterwards, that these doughty champions, as also Mr. Gladstone and Lord Palmerston, who took a similar course, were really fighting the battle of Mr. Disraeli; whose difficulty lay, not in his own desire to restore protection, for

which, in the true spirit of Vivian Grey, he cared nothing now that it had served his turn, but in the obstinate love of some of his followers for a protective duty ; which threatened him with serious difficulties.

Having thus started off well, Mr. Disraeli kept his ground in the same style during the remainder of the session. The opposition were clamorous for a dissolution of Parliament, and sought to make the public think that the ministers were averse to that step, when in fact it was their interest to precipitate it. Mr. Disraeli, night after night, had to parry the attacks of Lord John Russell, Sir James Graham, and Mr. Gladstone, each emulating the other in temporary violence. He exhibited so much courage and temper, and used his sarcastic powers so sparingly, and with such tact, that he nightly gained on the good opinion of the House ; until at last the coalesced leaders began to see that the more violent they were, the more they were playing the game of their crafty opponent. An attempt, on the part of Mr. Hume, to introduce a Reform Bill, including vote by ballot, household suffrage, and triennial parliaments, furnished Mr. Disraeli with an opportunity of showing that he had not forgotten some of his earlier political theories. He made a good Tory speech against the ballot, triennial parliaments, and such an extension of the suffrage as would increase the already preponderant influence of the middle class ; but at the same time he hinted, that he was favourable to giving the franchise to the educated and intelligent

working classes. This was a popular interpretation of his old dogma, that the aristocracy and the people form the nation.

It would be wearisome to follow Mr. Disraeli through all the many topics with which his able and indefatigable assailants compelled him to grapple. He met with a coarse but powerful antagonist in Mr. Bernal Osborne; and an inveterate enemy, Mr. Roebuck, also seized a tempting occasion to show up what he conceived to be Mr. Disraeli's inconsistency; taunting him with having hunted Sir Robert Peel out of office, and now being in office himself on false pretences; which proceedings were described as a shuffling course, which was highly mischievous for various reasons, and especially because it created in men's minds a low opinion of the morality of public men.

All these matters, however, had amounted to no more than mere skirmishing, in which Mr. Disraeli exhibited readiness, tact, and self-possession, such as might have been expected from one who had already won his parliamentary position. The attention, and in no small degree the curiosity, of the public, were now concentrated on a more important effort which it was Mr. Disraeli's duty to make. The period for the financial statement had arrived; and now was to be decided the great question between the detractors of the right honourable gentleman and his admirers, whether he was equal to the position he had assumed. On the one hand, his brilliant antecedents being considered, a partial success would not be sufficient: on the other, the ill-judged

malevolence of his adversaries had referred him to so low a rank as to financial ability, that almost any comparison ought to have been in his favour. As mankind are ever more ready to listen to detraction than to eulogy, the adverse opinion had found the greater currency with the vulgar, and with those inferior minds whose political passions colour their perceptions; and the odds were considered to be rather in favour of a *fiasco*. The result disappointed all but those who had accustomed themselves to reckon up the talents of Mr. Disraeli, irrespective of his or their political preferences. Mr. Disraeli's 'Budget' speech was universally admitted to be a masterly exposition. It took both friends and foes by surprise: neither were prepared for so candid and liberal an admission of the real benefits conferred on the people by the remission of customs' duties; still less did they expect to find the dull and dreary topics of finance handled with so consummate a skill, that while the practical was never lost sight of, the interesting and even the entertaining were sufficiently introduced to relieve the tedium of a long speech. As usual, the right honourable gentleman's motives and purposes seem to have been alike misunderstood. The multitude looked on the admissions of fact as a recantation of all past censures on Free Trade; whereas they amounted to little more than the statement of a self-evident proposition—namely, that it is better for a people to have plenty and cheapness than dearness and scarcity. In proportion to the popular belief, that Mr. Disraeli had

betrayed his principles and his party, was the popular gratitude. The people had for years been taught a sordid and mendicant view of affairs: they had learned to estimate public men not by their talents, or the moral excellence of their purposes, but by the amount of benefit they could extract from them. Mr. Disraeli so far shared in a common degradation.

Regarded, however, from another point of view, this 'budget' speech was really a remarkable exposition. Mr. Disraeli's *ruse* to gain the most sweet voices of the multitude in the market-place, and to gag the tribunes of the people, was a perfectly pardonable one, if we consider the ingenious detraction and misrepresentation to which himself and his friends had been exposed. Ever since the accession of the new Government, there had subsisted between the Whigs, the Radicals, and the followers of Sir James Graham, a coalition of which the sole bond of union was the preservation of free trade, by which appears to have been understood the non-imposition of any duty on corn, whether for Protection or revenue. The slightest indication on the part of the Tories of a contrary wish, would have been the signal for a joint and adverse vote of want of confidence, on the sole point whereon the new opposition could hope to agree. In all controversies, religious as well as political, the most fatal of all arguments is a definition. If each party really understood what itself and its antagonist were disputing about, the pleasure of the strife would be precluded.

The Tories were suffering under a skilful use by their opponents of popular misconceptions; they were universally believed to be engaged in a dark plot for the restoration of Protection, although Mr. Disraeli had months before, both in express terms and by implication, renounced a reactionary policy. In this state of things, the best service Mr. Disraeli could do to his party was by a word to break up the coalition; the best service he could render to the public was to let them see that, however much the Tories might be possessed with a devil, there was in Free Trade the virtue to cast it out. Nothing short of very strong measures would serve this purpose. A giant blow between the eyes is needful to fell an ox. An English mind cannot be persuaded that you really mean to fight, until the first blow be struck. Mr. Disraeli, being a shrewd and sagacious observer of the character of his countrymen, felt the absolute necessity of making them conscious that he really was in earnest. Accordingly, he did not merely admit the practical benefits of reduced import duties, but pronounced a handsome panegyric on the system, which now for nearly seven years had prevailed. At this point, however, his recantation or inconsistency stopped; and the public were really so delighted to find that they were not going to be made a meal of by those dreadful Protectionists, that they totally overlooked the other far more important characteristics of Mr. Disraeli's financial exposition. It is important to a right understanding of Mr. Disraeli's character,

fully to comprehend the scope and bearing of that speech. The English people can now afford to do justice to this very remarkable man. It is, indeed, their interest to do so, seeing that he must inevitably take an important part in the future affairs of this country, and that his power of rendering himself useful will mainly depend on the confidence placed in him. We have a theory as to this budget speech, quite different from that which regards it as only a recantation of Protectionist opinions; and we dwell somewhat on a past topic, because it seems to afford the key to Mr. Disraeli's political position.

In one of his first ministerial speeches, Mr. Disraeli promised the public a fair and honest statement of the real financial position of the country. Without the slightest intention to disparage his predecessors, we may say that foregoing budgets had rested rather on sanguine hopes than on actual facts. John Bull discovered, from year to year, that he had a balance at his bankers' varying from a million to two millions and a half; a fact which so pleased him that he did not always inquire whence the money came. A Chancellor of the Exchequer always prefers, if he can, to be the bearer of good tidings; thinking himself morally absolved from the blame of any little sanguine hallucinations, if he places all the figures honestly before the public, leaving them to use their pencil and slate. This had been the agreeable task of previous finance ministers, while the House of Commons triennially renewed the Income-tax;

but a rude stop had in the previous year been put to the indulgence, by the sudden refusal of the House of Commons to renew the Income-tax for more than one year. This enabled Mr. Disraeli to point out to the House of Commons that the aforesaid balance at John Bull's bankers was derived from a species of forced contribution as yet anomalous in character, and that were that source of revenue finally withdrawn, there would be not a surplus, but a frightful deficiency. Of course, every one knew that the Income-tax must be renewed in some form or other, and that the question hereafter to be decided was in what shape it should be imposed; but it was important that the general public should know the difference between an actual surplus on the annual accounts, and a surplus paid out of capital. Mr. Disraeli did good service to the State by simply expounding the real position of affairs, and making it clear to the public that the time was come, when they must choose between direct and indirect taxation—in other words, make the Income-tax permanent. Nor was this all. Mr. Disraeli shadowed forth a principle in connexion with the mode of raising that tax. Unable to commit himself too plainly in language, he said enough to indicate the direction of his mind. With the masterly lucidity which Mr. Disraeli, like Sir Robert Peel, can command, when it is not his purpose to mystify, he laid it down as a principle, that direct taxation must be as general and universal as indirect taxation, or it would be odiously unjust, and tan-

tamount to a system of confiscation. In other words, he objected to the exemption from direct taxation of a large class of persons who directly profit by indirect taxation. This was an important announcement quite overlooked by the public, greedy to keep the fruit of Free Trade ; yet it was a declaration that the principle of justice ought to be applied ; that there should be no limit to direct taxation, but the tangibility of the taxee ; and that if the people now specially exempted from indirect as well as direct taxation were admitted to have profited so largely by the abolition of the one, they ought, in common fairness, to contribute at least something towards the other.

These points made, and the usual routine of a finance statement having been gone through by Mr. Disraeli, with great clearness and grasp of his subject, Mr. Disraeli was enabled to suggest to the House, that the opinion of the public ought to be taken, on the abstract question as between direct and indirect taxation, and that pending his financial exposition in the new parliament, the House should permit matters to remain *in statu quo*, renewing the Property and Income-tax for one year only. This was immediately agreed to. The financial *début* of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer was, after the Palmerston drama, the most interesting event of the session. The hearty admiration of the English for ability, obtained for him an enthusiastic reception. He was constantly interrupted by spontaneous cheering, which was prolonged when he sat down. Compare this triumph with

the *fiasco* of 1837, and the extraordinary self-regenerating power of Mr. Disraeli will become the more apparent, especially when we reflect that these gratifying marks of approval were not offered in return for any flashy political speech, but were attributable to the conviction of the House, that the speaker had not exaggerated his powers when assuming the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that he had carried off the applause of the House of Commons, on the ground whereon it is proverbially most tenacious of its own superior wisdom.

It is unnecessary to follow Mr. Disraeli through all the details of his ministerial conduct as leader of the House of Commons. Each day, each week, he rose in the good opinion of the House, and on several occasions commanded powerful majorities. In one instance alone did he sustain a defeat; and it is not surprising that his discomfiture mainly arose from the recalcitration of his own supporters at his unexpected homage to Free Trade. The country gentlemen as little understood the true drift of the budget speech in their favour, as the multitude out of doors comprehended it in another way. When Mr. Disraeli made a proposal, to transfer to the West Riding of Yorkshire four seats declared vacant on account of bribery, he found himself left in a minority, by the desertion of a large number of his own followers; nevertheless, he came through with flying colours. In the meanwhile, Mr. Disraeli had published an address to the electors of Buckinghamshire, in which he put

the finishing stroke to the labour of the last four years, that of letting his party down from their untenable protectionist opinions, and reconciling them to some course of action in harmony with public opinion. The following passage from his published address is worthy of being preserved, as the last knell of 'Protection.' He said :—

'The time has gone by when the injuries which the great producing interests endure can be alleviated or removed by a recurrence to the laws which, previously to 1846, protected them from such calamities. The spirit of the age tends to free intercourse, and no statesman can disregard with impunity the genius of the epoch in which he lives. But every principle of abstract justice, and every consideration of high policy, counsel that the producer should be treated as fairly as the consumer; and intimate that when the native producer is thrown into unrestricted competition with external rivals, it is the duty of the legislature in every way to diminish, certainly not to increase, the cost of production. It is the intention of her Majesty's ministers to recommend to parliament, as soon as it is in their power, measures which may effect this end. One of the soundest means, among others, by which this result may be accomplished, is a revision of our taxation. The times are favourable to such an undertaking; juster notions of taxation are more prevalent than heretofore; powerful agencies are stirring, which have introduced new phenomena into finance, and altered the complexion of the fiscal world; and the possi-

bility of greatly relieving the burdens of the community, both by adjustment and reduction, seems to loom in the future.'

These views Mr. Disraeli explained still more practically in subsequent speeches on the hustings; and when re-elected for Buckinghamshire, he found himself at the head of the largest minority in the House of Commons, composed of gentlemen fully aware of his views and intentions, and precluded by that knowledge from bringing against him the charge of inconsistency, so successfully wielded by himself in former years against Sir Robert Peel—a charge which the admirers of the deceased statesman could meet with the plea of overwhelming necessity, while Mr. Disraeli lies open to the imputation of having very skilfully contrived that his own personal ambition should jump with the interests of his party and the wishes of the public. Looking back at the great political events of the last five and twenty years, and seeing how every influential public man has been compelled to abandon early opinions, and advocate policy that was not self-chosen, it seems quite unnecessary to defend Mr. Disraeli against the charge of inconsistency. He who aspires to be a statesman must duly think and act for the good of the state.

IX.

IT remains to give some traits of Mr. Disraeli as an orator.

The whole bearing of Mr. Disraeli, and his dis-

inctive features as a speaker, are so peculiar, as to render the task of description very difficult, at least in order to convey to the mind of the reader any clear and tangible idea of the man. If he have already seen some of the admirable sketches made of Mr. Disraeli by H. B., it will much facilitate his comprehension.

There is decided character about the whole external of Mr. Disraeli, yet it is most difficult to determine in what it especially consists. The first impression conveyed to your mind, as, with clothes shaped apparently with too much care for effect, and those long flakes of curling black hair that can hardly be distinguished from the ringlets of a woman, he walks hastily, with a self-absorbed air, and a quick, short, shuffling gait, towards his seat, —is that of an effeminate, nay, almost an emasculate affectation. There seems to be a dandyism, not merely of the body, but of the mind also. We usually associate the idea of pride with an erect crest, a lofty gaze, a hauteur of bearing. Strange to say, Mr. Disraeli's bearing produces the same impression, from a totally opposite cause. He has an habitual stoop, and there is that in his bearing and carriage which might be mistaken for humility. He has also an air of self-absorption, which does not appear natural; rather it seems to arise from an affected indifference to the gaze or the observation of others. It is not the less pride, though not of the most noble order. You can see glimpses of an evidence that self-esteem is no stranger to his mind. In spite of the assumed stolidity, you

may detect the self-constraint and the furtive regards of a very vain man, who is trying to appear as if he were not vain at all. Although his eyes are downcast, they have not the downcast look of modesty, but rather of a sort of superciliousness, which is the most striking expression on the face. He seems to look down, because he considers it too much trouble to look up.

But a further study leads you to think that your first impressions have been erroneous. You see that the intellectual preponderates in Mr. Disraeli's organisation, and, by degrees, you begin to believe that he is as much absorbed as he seems to be. Like Sir Robert Peel, he appears to isolate himself—to have no associates in the House, except those forced on him by the immediate necessities of party. This isolation and self-absorption are equally conspicuous, whether he is quiescent or in activity. Observe him anywhere about the House, in the lobbies, or in the committee-rooms; you never see him in confidential communication with any one. All inlets of information and impression seem as if they were violently closed up by an effort of the will. Yet we know from Mr. Disraeli's speeches and writings, that he is keenly alive to the slightest and most impalpable changes going on around him—that, in fact, his intellect must be ever on the watch, although, to an observer, it seems to be in a state of self-imposed torpor. See him where you will, he glides past you noiselessly, without being

apparently conscious of the existence of externals, and more like the shadow than the substance of a man. Involuntarily, he comports himself like one possessed by a melancholic monomania, and who has no natural relations with the realities of life. When he is speaking, he equally shrouds himself in his own intellectual atmosphere. You would think he paid no regard to the thought of whom he was addressing, but only to the ideas he was enunciating in words. Still with downcast eyes, still with what may almost be called a torpor of the physical powers, he seems more an intellectual abstraction than a living, breathing man of passions and sympathies. If some one of his friends interrupts him to offer a friendly suggestion, or to correct a misstatement of facts, the chances are that he will not notice him at all, or, if he does, that it will be with a gesture of impatience, or with something like a snarl, as, when a man is grinding a hand-organ, if his hand suddenly be stopped, the pipes utter a slight discordant moan. This singular self-absorption betrays itself even when he is in a sitting posture. You never see him gazing around him, or lolling back in his seat, or seeking to take his ease as other men do in the intervals of political excitement. He sits with his head rigid, his body contracted, his arms closely pinned to his side, as though he were an automaton. He looks like one of those stone figures of ancient Egypt, that embody the idea of motionless quiescence for ever. The mental seems in him to subjugate, if not to supersede, the moral. The exercise of the thinking

faculty appears alone sufficient to satisfy the cravings of his nature. He lives in a world of his own, and feeds that appetite for association which is natural to man, with the fruit of his own thoughts. He seeks dominion rather by the force of his talent than by the interchange of political or personal sympathies.

We have said that the intellectual predominates in his organisation; yet his countenance, while really it is highly intellectual, belies the ordinary rules of the physiognomists. It is scarcely an index to the mind. The soul does not look out from the eyes. The real character of the mind is not stamped on the countenance, but the natural temper seems violently restrained or constrained. Sometimes the traits are those of one self-condemned to a perpetual abstinence from passion, or even from the indulgence of that natural candour of the human character to which the physical organisation is the obedient slave, and which stamps the impress of the passions, or of the intellectual or moral propensities, upon the features. Mr. Disraeli embodies in these respects the popular ideas of the Jesuit—of one who dares not be natural even to himself. Shylock entering on the great judgment-scene, when triumphing in the consciousness of suppressed power, presents us with some prototype (not wishing to be personal), as far as external action is concerned, in his having the same stooping, crouching gait, with the same furtive glances of downcast eyes, the same flashes ever and anon, denoting some concealed, fixed purpose.

Both the features and the expression of Mr. Disraeli are most puzzling. There is a something in the aspect and whole bearing which speaks of intellectual power, yet the face is often abandoned to an expression, or rather a no-expression, that almost amounts to fatuity. The countenance seems to 'hang,' as it were: the forehead hangs (though the eye-brows are raised); the eyes hang, the mouth hangs, the chin hangs. The head hangs downwards on the chest, the shoulders hang, and the whole body stoops. There is no appearance of a sustaining spirit—of that intellectual or moral dignity, which distinguishes man from the animals. The gait, looked at physically only, is a merely plodding movement; yet there is in it nothing loose or commonplace; but a vigour and precision of step gives it character, and makes it harmonise in singularity with the rest of the external attributes. It was probably originally an affectation, that has grown into an unconquerable habit. Upon the whole, after the most attentive study of the impenetrable countenance, in repose, and an attempt to comprehend what may be called the physiognomy of the person, and those unconscious habits which so much betray the real character of ordinary men, the utmost you arrive at in determining the characteristics of the whole, is a pervading air of self-possession and impassibility, implying the existence of powers of mind, not displayed, but latent. Most remarkable men carry, as it were, a sort of table of contents about them in their external aspect, but in Mr. Disraeli this is a blank leaf.

As an orator, Mr. Disraeli cannot be pronounced highly eloquent. In even his finest declamatory passages he fails to excite the feelings, although he often astonishes the mind, and stimulates the imagination. They more often suggest thought than touch the sympathies. He never abandons himself to his theme, but always holds it in subjection to his purpose. Yet this abandonment, restrained by prudence and good taste, often achieves, in master hands, the most remarkable triumphs of oratory. Mr. Disraeli delivers his best periods as if they were a conned task. Generally, his delivery is not good or effective,—at least, as compared with that of Mr. Sheil or Lord Derby. But although, critically, it is wanting in graces, yet we are far from saying that, taken in connexion with his peculiar idiosyncrasy, it has not character and force. In both voice and manner there is much monotony. He wants variety in action, gesture, expression, and elocution,—always excepting when he breathes his sarcastic vein. Perseverance is one of the leading traits of his oratory, as it has also distinguished his public career. Like Mr. Villiers, he *hammers* his sentences into the mind of his audience. His whole manner, as an orator, is peculiar to himself. It would scarcely be tolerated in another; he seems so careless, supercilious, indifferent to the trouble of pleasing. He can be compared, in these respects, with no other speaker in parliament. Mr. Pemberton, as an advocate at the bar, most resembled him in the physical attributes of his style, but in nothing else. His action, where he

has any, is ungraceful; nay, what is worse, it is studiously careless—even offensively so. With his supercilious expression of countenance, slightly dashed with pomposity, and a dilettanti affectation, he stands with his hands on his hips, or his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, while there is a slight, very slight, gyratory movement of the upper part of his body, such as you will see ball-room exquisites adopt when they condescend to prattle a flirtation. And then, with voice, low-toned and slightly drawling, without emphasis, except when he strings himself up for his ‘points,’ his words are not so much delivered as that they flow from the mouth, as if it were really too much trouble for so clever, so intellectual—in a word, so literary a man to speak at all. You think that he undervalues his subject, and looks down upon his audience; and although you, at least, perceive that all this is but a bad habit, still it is offensive in its effect.

So much for his ordinary level speaking. When he makes his ‘points,’ the case is totally different. Then his manner changes. He becomes more animated, though still less so than any other speaker of equal power over the House. You can then detect the nicest and most delicate inflections in the tones of his voice; and they are managed, with exquisite art, to give effect to the irony or sarcasm of the moment. Much, not only of the force, but also of the venom of his sarcasms, depends upon this fine management of his voice, and the almost imperceptible motion with which it is accompanied, and a subtle harmony is found

to exist between the two, such as one remembers to have seen in Young's performance of *Iago*. In the by-play of oratory, Mr. Disraeli is without a rival,—not forgetting, however, that, as yet, his range has been limited. But, in what he has done, neither Lord Derby nor even Mr. Sheil has approached him, if we bear in mind the amount of effort relatively betrayed. In conveying an inuendo, an ironical sneer, or a suggestion of contempt, which courtesy forbids him to translate into words,—in conveying such masked enmities by means of a glance, a shrug, an altered tone of voice, or a transient expression of face, he is unrivalled. Not only is the shaft envenomed, but it is aimed with deadly precision by a cool hand and a keen eye, with a courage fearless of retaliation. He will convulse the House by the action that helps his words, yet leave nothing for his victim to take hold of. He is a most dangerous antagonist in this respect, because so intangible. And all the while you are startled by his extreme coolness and impassibility. You might almost think he was a mere machine, uttering sentiments by rule, so does he divorce the intellectual from the moral, and suppress even the natural physical signs of exultation at success. You might suppose him wholly unconscious of the effect he is producing; for he never seems to laugh or to chuckle, however slightly, at his own hits. While all around him are convulsed with merriment or excitement at some of his finely wrought sarcasms, he holds himself, seemingly, in total suspension, as though he

had no existence for the ordinary feelings and passions of humanity; and the moment the shouts and confusion have subsided, the same calm, low, monotonous, but yet distinct and searching voice, is heard still pouring forth his ideas, while he is preparing to launch another sarcasm, hissing hot, into the soul of his victim. There is something feline in the stealthy steadiness with which he maintains the level theme of his speech till the moment when he is to pounce on his prey. He aims much at surprises, though striving to conceal this part of his art. It is a great pride with him to introduce his 'hits' so suddenly that neither his victim nor his audience has the least suspicion at what moment the bolt will fall. The scenes in the House during his attacks on Sir Robert Peel were intensely dramatic, especially at first, before his audience grew accustomed to expect great things from him. It was amusing to see the perfect complacency with which Sir Robert Peel would sit in his place as prime minister, so confident in his own strength as to think himself able to despise his assailant; nay, even to sit and listen for his own amusement—perhaps, to laugh at the extravagances or the 'high nonsense' of his bombastical antagonist. And it was equally striking to see the perfect self-reliance, the cool confidence, the audacious courage, with which Mr. Disraeli would advance to the assault on a reputation and influence consolidated by years of parliamentary triumph. Nor if the actors in this drama were thus conspicuous and

marked in character, was it the less interesting to watch their audience also,—to observe the comparative indifference, not unmingled with a malicious curiosity, with which they regarded for a long time both the speaker and his subject, changed, as it suddenly and permanently became, into a sustained excitement and attention, as Mr. Disraeli's deliberate process of tormenting, and at last, of torturing his antagonist, became developed from month to month, and from session to session. The command he by degrees acquired over what, we fear, must be called their baser passions, was wonderful. For him to rise late, in a stormy debate, cool, even to iciness, amidst the fever-heat of party atmosphere around, was suddenly to arrest all passions, all excitement, all murmurs of conversation, and convert them into one absorbing feeling of curiosity and expectation. They knew not on whom to fix their watch,—whether on the speaker, that they might not lose the slightest gesture of his by-play, or whether they should concentrate their attention on his distinguished victim, whom he had taught them almost to regard with levity, because he had not failed to exult over the testiness and irritability which such malevolent assaults had compelled him to betray. The power of the orator was more confessed, perhaps, in the nervous twitchings of Sir Robert Peel, and his utter powerlessness to look indifferent, or to conceal his palpable annoyance at the attacks made on him with such undisguised spitefulness, yet with such withering force, than even in the delirious

laughter with which the House accepted and sealed the truth of the attacks,—followed, in justice, let us add, by a sort of compunction that they should thus have joined in ridiculing their former idol. This positive ascendancy of Mr. Disraeli was confined to the time when his attacks on Sir Robert Peel were responded to by the mingled appreciation and party-feeling of the House; but, while it lasted, it was such as no living orator has ever attained, except Lord Brougham in his Tribunitian days, or Lord Derby when in the House of Commons. The orator's craft was shown in his so clearly detecting the favourable occasion, and the vulnerable points of his victim, quite as much as was his skill in his triumphant execution of his plan of operations.

Those speeches of Mr. Disraeli which have not been especially devoted to these objects deserve praise for their intrinsic merits. Their quality is often of a high order. Some of them, for argument, for their general conception, and for their diction, will rank with the finest efforts of contemporary orators. The range, both of his subjects and his mode of treating them, is higher than that of most speakers. His views of contemporary politics are lofty, and his historical strokes elevated above the narrowness of comprehension and passion for details, which characterise the present time. He has a singular command of language, in the strictest sense of the term. All his speeches betray evidences of the exercise of the imaginative faculty, and they are often tinged with

the colouring of foreign and Oriental habits of thought. He resembles Mr. Macaulay in his disposition to infuse historical illustrations and enlarged views of politics into the debates of the hour, while he resembles Mr. Sheil and Lord Derby in his ironical and sarcastic powers; though neither of those orators, although so accomplished, attained to his combined power of language and action. Although the declamatory passages in his speeches are still sometimes inflated, yet they exhibit such a marked improvement on his early efforts, that the most sanguine hopes may be entertained that he will at last arrive at a perfect taste in this respect. He has shown a great variety of powers. He can be argumentative, or business-like, when necessary, with as much ease, though, of course, with not so brilliant an effect, as he can be sarcastic. On subjects of an abstract order, where, for instance, the theme is literature, or science, or philosophy, he rises to the height that is due, and attains a loftiness of thought and purity of style, while his eloquence becomes more graceful in proportion to the care with which he has been able to study his oratory as an art.

As a politician, Mr. Disraeli has been gradually developing, each year making more progress and taking a higher tone than before. At first, in his parliamentary displays, he exhibited much exaggeration of thought and language, while his manner was affectedly pompous. He shot high, and almost always missed his aim. There was an absurd grandiloquence very unbecoming in so young a

speaker. But a sudden change came over him. He had before mistaken his red and blue fire for real splendour : a purer taste now superseded these delusions of a diseased imagination. He put himself in training, and soon his strong natural talent and decided originality, with this aid, triumphed over the wayward and capricious habits he had formerly allowed his mind to indulge in. He rapidly retraced his false steps, and founded his new reputation. His sarcastic attacks on Sir Robert Peel, were the first efforts of his improved powers that seriously attracted the attention of the House. Until then a strong prejudice had prevailed against him, which he overcame by sheer force of genius. Session after session, month after month, he went on consolidating his new-found strength and reputation, while, as time advanced, and circumstances favoured, he took a higher ground, and entered on a wider field than that which personalities, however clever or successful, can ever afford. His speeches grew more statesmanlike ; and although the principles on which he framed his theory of a political system were not popular, they were at least intelligible. Moreover, he was the first to expose that ascendancy of political materialism which has been so fatal to the character of our public men, by lowering the tone of statesmen, and debasing their policy. He long sustained an eloquent and indignant protest against that reign of red-tapeism—that fruitless incubation of complacent mediocrity, which has for many years repressed political genius. He would not

worship false gods, but strove to win men back to the true faith. He certainly imparted vigour and coherency to the significant but uncombined speculations and desires of that band of original thinkers, who were so much ridiculed as the Young England party; and whether those who were, until recently, the Protectionists, place confidence in him or not, they never can divest themselves of the obligation they owe him for his brilliant services in the late campaign. He has cried *peccavi* for many of his early sins. With much dignity and modest candour he took occasion to apologise in the House of Commons for the virulence of some of the personalities he directed against the Whigs at the outset of his career; and he also, with a noble forgetfulness of personal insults, and an admission of his own excesses in the same direction, made amends to O'Connell for his former abuse, by deliberately speaking of him in debate as 'that great man.' In fact, in proportion as he has progressed in the art of self-government, and steadied himself from the violent oscillations of his earlier life, he has shown an earnest and honourable desire to bury the past in oblivion; like some new state, the child of revolution, wishing to be received into the family of nations.

As a debater, Mr. Disraeli has attained high eminence. To improve upon the sarcastic power with which he assailed Sir Robert Peel would have been impossible, but to have abstained in a great measure from the use of that disagreeable weapon, is itself a sign of improvement. The responsi-

bilities of his position have solidified the character of this once nebulous and comet-like crusader against the real, the prosaic, and the practical. Without knowing the fact, we should infer that Mr. Disraeli must have studied hard in branches of political knowledge the least inviting to a man of his soaring and imaginative spirit. At all events, he carries more ballast than heretofore, and the most accomplished of debaters, the most trained of statistes and publicists, find him a doughty antagonist, even on their own chosen ground. It is astonishing with what aptitude the Vivian Grey of 1828 has developed into the sedate and somewhat formal statesman of 1852. At first, with the memory of his earlier, even of recent, follies still active, the notion of the author of *Alroy* and the *Revolutionary Epic* being the Leader of the House of Commons, and exercising a direct control over debates and the fate of parties, seemed absurd enough. But so did the ascendancy of other men of the day at their outset, though now it be acquiesced in with a religious respect. Mr. Disraeli has shown himself a tactician in more senses than one. His personal demeanour has been as well calculated as his political manœuvring; so much so, that it is not *within* the walls of the House of Commons that any doubt is entertained of his ability—ay, or even of his soundness. One only doubts whether the advance he has made has not been too rapid to be real; whether to a fortunate concurrence of accidents must not be attributed his parliamentary successes. That is a

question into which we do not desire to enter; but, in justice to this very remarkable man, we feel bound to declare, that his mental and moral development has kept pace with his political advancement; that he has matured the crudities, and thrown off the vicious excrescences, which formerly weakened or defaced his character; that his speeches are skilful amalgamations of the useful practical matter needed in parliamentary debates, with the ornamental and graceful adjuncts which relieve discussion from dulness and dreariness; that personal display is subordinated to political duty; that pompous extravagances of imagery have vanished from his diction, and impossible party combinations from his political theories; that he no longer comes down on his contemporaries in the panoply of the middle ages, with lance in rest, and some forgotten ensign for his war-cry, but is in the Commons and of the Commons, a steady-going, arithmetical, practical middle-aged gentleman of the nineteenth century, a working statesman, and, with all his brilliancy, at times a little prosaic. In fact, he is so thoroughly changed in these respects, that the old familiar style seems to have become utterly strange to him. He has paid such devotions at the altar of the practical, that his flights of rhetorical eloquence, although undoubtedly finer than those of any contemporary in the House, have in them something of the untrue. All that used to be bombast is so completely surrendered to the practical, that passages, instinct with a lofty spirit of truth, almost seem bombastic.

In this way he makes involuntary atonement for the literary and political sins of his earlier career. If in this brief retrospect we have suggested considerations tending to throw the light of truth on Mr. Disraeli's real character and career, we shall not only have done an act of justice to an individual, but also have conferred a benefit on the public, by leading them to form a more correct judgment than that suggested by sneering and jealous rivals, of a man whose antecedents and present position point him out as likely hereafter to take a still more distinguished part in the History of his Country.

THE END